FOUCAULT'S GENEALOGY

Introduction

'Method' is usually a 'means' towards an 'end' (a 'way'). As such, method stands *midway of* an assumption/hypothesis and an end. For example, one may start with the hypothesis that there is an increasing tendency for individuals to commit suicide in modern societies and that individual decisions to give an end to one's life are affected by the different forms of social solidarity in different societies. One would then need a 'method' whereby to test the above hypothesis. Accordingly, one may proceed by using and analyzing the suicide statistics of different societies. The goal would then be to identify different types of suicide. These turn out to be four; namely, "egotistic", "anomic", "altruistic" and "fatalistic" suicides.[1] Can genealogy operate in the same way?

This paper will discuss what Foucauldian genealogy consists in, while showing Foucault's debt to Nietzsche. A simple definition of Foucauldian genealogy would be that it is a type of *history*. However, it is a *specific* type of history.[2]

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[1] E. Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (London: Routledge, 1970).

[2] Foucault says: "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

Foucault's genealogical history seeks to deconstruct what was previously regarded as unified (i.e. history as a chronological pattern of events emanating from a mystified but all-determining point of departure), while also attempting to identify an underlying continuity which is the product of "discontinuous systematicities".[3] Moreover, in contrast to the Hegelian and Marxist philosophies of history, 'genealogy' is *not* an *holistic* project but a *perspectival* enterprise. Foucauldian genealogy is an history of tracing 'origins' and, as such, it questions the idea of origins or deeper meanings. It unearths the *force relations* operating in particular events and historical developments. Foucault describes his genealogy as an "effective history".[4] Foucauldian genealogy debunks the assumption underlying conventional historiography that there are 'facts' to be interpreted; rather, facts are themselves constructed out of the researcher's "will to truth".[5] Furthermore, Foucauldian genealogy shows how 'subjects' are constituted in discourses.[6] The paper will also

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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." "Truth and Power", in *Power/Knowlegde: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1971-1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham, K. Soper (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), p. 117.

[3] M. Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. R. Young (Boston, London, Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 69.

[4] M. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 87-90.

[5] Foucault refers to the "will to truth" in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1: *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 79.

[6] M. Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) – English translation: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991); M. Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Vol. 1: *La Volonté de Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) – English translation: *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1.

discuss Foucault's "analytics"[7] of power and the extent to which genealogy is a *critique*.

What is Genealogy?

Foucault describes genealogy using one of Nietzsche's well-known metaphors. Genealogy is "gray", its task being to *decipher* the hieroglyphic script of humans' past, a past that is neither black (i.e. totally unknown) nor white (i.e. transparent), but something in between (gray), that is, *ambiguous* and *uncertain*. Thus, a rigorous investigation is needed, if the meaning of the past is to be uncovered: "Genealogy, consequently, requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material."[8] Due to its minuteness, genealogy may at first give us the impression that it deals with trivial, everyday things, rather than with important developments. However, genealogy acquires its character from recording "what we tend to feel is without history", instances such as "sentiments, love, conscience, instincts".[9]

Crucially, the writing of the human past by the genealogist is necessarily an *interpretation*, which itself is neither true nor false. For Foucault, the genealogist is an interpreter but *not* a hermeneutician. The genealogist as *interpreter* recognizes that the meaning he/she gives to history is doubtful (hence "gray"), "acknowledges its system

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[7] Foucault insisted that he did not offer a "theory" but an "analytics" of power. See M. Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Vol. 1, p. 109; *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p. 82. For a view that Foucault's analyses of power constitute a "theory", albeit in a qualified sense, see Richard A. Lynch, "Foucault's Theory of Power", in D. Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), pp. 14-16.

[8] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", pp. 76-77.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

of injustice"[10] and the fact that his/her interpretation is subject to revision. The genealogist-interpreter has a sense of where he/she stands in history and does not ignore the fact that he/she is the product of historic and social circumstances; however, *simultaneously* he/she is able to distance him-/herself from his/her situation in order to examine things from afar. In doing so, the genealogist-interpreter ignores the actors' own interpretation(s) of the meaning of their actions. Therefore, the genealogical approach is one of detachment. By contrast, the approach of the *hermeneutician* is one of engagement, as he/she attempts to grasp the significance of things from within them. As opposed to the interpreter-hermeneutician, the genealogist-interpreter "finds that the questions which are traditionally held to be the deepest and murkiest are truly and literally the most superficial". Thus, "their meaning is to be discovered in surface practices, not in mysterious depths".[11] Accordingly, a genealogical interpretation is distinctly different from a hermeneutical approach.

The claim that interpretation is *not* the uncovering of a hidden meaning has revolutionary implications for philosophy; or better, it is a direct attack against philosophy as it traditionally has been understood. For Foucault's genealogy undermines the belief in the existence of unchanging essences and truths. When he realized that there are no primordial verities in the world, Foucault shifted his emphasis from his early studies on madness[12] to his work of the seventies and

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[10] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[11] H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 107.

[12] M. Foucault, *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l' Âge Classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961) – English translation: *History of Madness*, foreword by I. Hacking, ed. J. Khalfa, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006).

eighties. In his early work Foucault had pre-supposed an *essence* of madness, namely, an original truth. But in his genealogical writings Foucault engaged in a *de*constructive exercise. Continuing Nietzsche's tradition of "philosophizing with the hammer",[13] Foucault sought to destroy all the metaphysical ideas that have dominated Western philosophy since Plato.

Foucault was more conscious of genealogy as a *method* than Nietzsche was.[14] Therefore, he set forth its objectives. To begin with, Foucault was more careful to define what genealogy as an history concerned with tracing origins meant. In examining Nietzsche's genealogy, Foucault noted that Nietzsche used "*Ursprung*", "*Entstehung*" and "*Herkunft*" interchangeably. Foucault argues that the problem of the term "*Ursprung*" is that it refers to "something that was already there" – viz. a deeper reality – before the search began.

> However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is "something altogether different" behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.[15]

In other words, for Foucault, the idea of the "origin" is just a metaphysical truth that has dominated European thought for two thousand years. In Nietzschean terms,

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[13] F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, translated with notes by R. J. Hollingdale, intro. by M. Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 86 ("How to Philosophize with a Hammer").

[14] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. C. Diethe, ed. K. Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[15] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 78.

genealogy questions the "will to truth": "…devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and ending discussions, and their spirit of competition – the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason".[16]

According to Foucault, "*Herkunft*" and "*Entstehung*" characterize the task of genealogy better.

> *Herkunft* is the equivalent of stock or *descent*; it is the ancient affiliation to a group, sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition, or social class. The analysis of *Herkunft* often involves a consideration of race or social type. But the traits it attempts to identify are not the exclusive generic characteristics of an individual, a sentiment, or an idea, which permit us to qualify them as "Greek" or "English"; rather, it seeks the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel.[17]

Genealogy engages in deconstruction, for the analysis of "*Herkunft*" fragments what was considered unified; it does not merely challenge the linear conception of history but also identifies an underlying continuity, which is the product of "the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to

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[16] *Ibid*.

[17] *Ibid*., pp. 80-81.

those things that continue to exist and have value for us".[18] As Foucault says, genealogy elaborates "a theory of discontinuous systematicities".[19] However, although these discontinuous series have their regularity, there are no links of mechanical causality or of ideal necessity between the elements that constitute them. Hence the significance of chance, accident or *aléa*.

"*Entstehung*", on the other hand, denotes *emergence*, that is, "the moment of arising". So it is different from "origin" in the usual sense of the word; for "origin" usually has metaphysical connotations, as it implies an as yet unknown purpose that seeks its realization the moment it arises. However, genealogy does not seek to uncover substantial entities; rather, it studies the emergence of a battle which defines and clears a space.[20] Instead of origins or deeper meanings Foucault, the genealogist, finds *force relations* operating in particular events[21] and historical developments. This is where Foucault's genealogical analysis is reminiscent of Nietzsche's. There is an important difference, however; whereas Nietzsche grounds morality as well as social and political institutions in the tactics ("will to power") of individual actors or groups of actors, Foucault sees social and political practices as the result of strategies without strategists: "…no one is responsible for an emergence; no one

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[18] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[19] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", p. 69.

[20] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", pp. 83-84.

[21] For the idea of "eventalization" see Foucault, "Questions of Method", in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. R. Hurley and others (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 226-229.

can glory in it, since it always occurs in the *interstice*".[22] Foucault's use of the term "interstice" should be emphasized; the play of forces at a particular historical context is conditioned – to some extent – by the space which defines them. For Foucault, human actors do not first exist and then enter into combat or harmony; rather, they emerge on a field of battle. Subjects are caught in networks of power – what Foucault calls "meticulous rituals of power" ("dispositifs")[23] – that lie beyond their control. These "rituals of power" are neither the conscious creation of actors nor simply a set of relationships; nor are they located in specific places; nor is it easy to identify the moment of their emergence. It is the task of Foucault's genealogy to identify and analyze these "meticulous rituals of power".

In *Discipline and Punish* and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault isolates specific sites (*not* places) of "rituals of power", namely, Bentham's Panopticon and the confessional.[24] As genealogist, Foucault then tries to specify how power works, when, how, and what its effects are. The rules that emerge from "rituals of power" are passed into civil law or moral conventions, which – supposedly – prevent the violence that would otherwise ensue. But, as a genealogical analysis demonstrates, these rules and conventions only perpetuate power and facilitate its diffusion within the body politic as a

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[22] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 85 (my italics).

[23] Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Vol. 1, p. 99 («dispositif»); "Power and Strategies", in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 138 ("*dispositifs*").

[24] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 200-209 and *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 61-62, respectively. On Bentham's Panopticon see also Foucault, "The Eye of Power", in *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 146-165.

whole.[25] According to Foucault, "Power is war, the continuation of war by other means."[26] He inverts Clausewitz's dictum that "*War is a mere continuation of policy by other means*",[27] arguing instead that "politics is the continuation of war by other means".[28]

Genealogy searches "for instances of discursive production (which also administer silences, to be sure), of the production of power (which sometimes have the function of prohibiting), of the propagation of knowledge (which often cause mistaken beliefs or systematic misconceptions to circulate)". Genealogy writes "the history of these instances and their transformations".[29] So a genealogical history of sexuality unmasks the fact that since the end of the sixteenth century the "putting into discourse of sex" has been a technique of power exercised over sex, which has allowed the "dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities". Further, "the will to knowledge has

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[25] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 85.

[26] M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. M. Bertani and A. Fontana, trans. D. Macey (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 15.

[27] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited with an introduction by A. Rapoport (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 119.

[28] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 15. For Foucault, this implies: First, that power relations "are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment that can be historically specified" (*ibid*.); second, political power constitutes a "silent war", a it reinscribes that relationship of force "in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals"; third, "…the last battle would put an end to politics…would at last…suspend the exercise of power as continuous warfare" (*ibid*., p. 16).

[29] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p. 12.

not come to a halt in the face of a taboo that must not be lifted, but has persisted in constituting – despite many mistakes, of course – a science of sexuality".[30]

Rules "are impersonal and can be bent to any purpose"[31] – this is one of the most important lessons that Nietzsche has taught us. A traditional historical analysis of the 'purpose' of social and political institutions can*not* unearth their "*Entstehung*" because "The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them".[32] Genealogy shows, therefore, that interpretations are dependent on specific configurations of power. And the more the genealogist-interpreter uncovers an interpretation the more she/he finds not a fixed meaning but only another interpretation. In this way the arbitrariness of all interpretation is revealed. Since there is no 'original' essence, there is nothing to interpret; and, if there is nothing to interpret, everything is open to interpretation. This is the insight we gain by practising genealogy.

One can challenge Foucault's genealogical method on the grounds that its findings are actually the presuppositions that make genealogy possible. Specifically, one can ask: Are such claims as "all that exists is interpretation" and "power, subjection, domination are everywhere" really the results of a genealogical survey? Or do they have ontological validity? If the latter, then there is a problem. To be sure, Foucault acknowledges that genealogy itself is

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[30] *Ibid*., pp. 12-13.

[31] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 86.

[32] *Ibid*.

perspectival.[33] And it could be argued in favour of genealogy that, provided it recognizes its partiality (i.e. its interpretation), it is permissible that it sets forth its hypotheses. Having destroyed metaphysical beliefs and verities, Foucault looks at the play of wills. Indeed, it seems that Foucault treats force relations and the interpretations that arise therefrom as universal truths. In other words, from Foucault's perspective, the play of wills has ontological status. One can ask whether Foucault's hypothesis of the fluidity or 'play' of wills is better – viz. more valid – than other ontological claims. Is Foucault justified in thinking that his perspective is a more profound and accurate insight into life? However, one can say, in support of Foucault, that the hypothesis of the play of wills and the fluidity of interpretations is 'thin', compared to other more substantial ontological claims (i.e. God exists).[34]

I now turn to a consideration of *what type of history* genealogy is and how it differs from traditional history. Foucault says that genealogy is an "effective history" ("wirkliche Historie"). What are the main features of "effective history"? Firstly, "effective history" puts everything into motion; that is, it *relativizes* all ideals of truth, firmness and solidity. As Foucault puts it, "…it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man".[35] We have noted above that genealogy attacks metaphysics; for Foucault, history "can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes".[36] Secondly, having dispensed

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[33] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[34] Many years ago I discussed this issue with Kimberly Hutchings, to whom I am grateful for an exciting discussion. I have benefited immensely from this exchange.

[35] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", p. 87.

[36] *Ibid*.

with metaphysics, genealogy as "effective history" eschews a supra-historical perspective. This is done by reversing the relationship between proximity and distance.[37] Whereas traditional history examines the distant past, "Effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance…".[38] Also, genealogy recognizes its interested character.[39] Moreover, unlike traditional history which is past-oriented, genealogy is an "history of the present". Foucault says in *Discipline and Punish*:

> I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.[40]

What is wrong with "a history of the past in terms of the present"? According to Foucault, this is the "presentist fallacy"; the historian takes "a model or a concept, an institution, a feeling, or a symbol from his present" and attempts to "find that it had a parallel meaning in the past".[41] Nor does a genealogical history attempt to discover the underlying laws of history, thereby falling in the trap of finalism. The latter holds that the present is the accomplishment of some latent goal in the past. Rather, a genealogical history begins with a *diagnosis of*

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[37] *Ibid*., p. 89.

[38] *Ibid*.

[39] *Ibid*., p. 90.

[40] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 30-31.

[41] Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault*, p. 118.

the present. The genealogist-historian locates the manifestations of a given "meticulous ritual of power" to see where it arose and how it developed. *Discipline and Punish* examines the "*Entstehung*" of the human sciences (which Foucault calls "pseudo-sciences") and their relation to the "*Entstehung*" of the prison. Foucault says:

> This book is intended as…a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules, from which it extends its effects and by which it masks its exorbitant singularity."[42]

A genealogical enquiry shows that "…power produces knowledge…that power and knowledge directly imply one another".[43] What is the relationship between the prison and the human sciences? It seems that Foucault does not clearly differentiate between the two *Entstehungsgeschichten*, despite the fact that he did not wish to reduce the one to the other. Notice:

> *I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison*. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile and useful.[44]

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[42] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 23.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 27.

[44] *Ibid*., p. 305 (my italics).

The connection that Foucault makes between "power" and "knowledge" is innovative. Foucault's use of a hyphen between these two terms is meant to show the constitutive (or productive) aspect of knowledge.[45] Power (relations) and knowledge (or truth) implicate each other,[46] hence Foucault's term "power-knowledge"[47] («*pouvoir-savoir*»).[48]

The meaning of the composite term "*pouvoir/savoir*" is more complex than the English translation "power/knowledge" would at first sight suggest. In French there are different words for different forms of knowledge. In his archaeological works Foucault used the word "*savoir*" to refer to the "implicit knowledge" characteristic of an historical epoch, that is, to the "common sense" of a people at that time at a specific place; he was concerned with how the "*savoir*" shaped the "explicit knowledge" – what he called "*connaissance*" – "that is institutionalized in the disciplines that make up the human sciences".[49] Concerning "*pouvoir*", although it is translated as "power", one should not forget that in French it is also the infinitive form of the verb "to be able to", i.e. "can". Accordingly, as Ellen K. Feder says:

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[45] M. Foucault, "Two Lectures", in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 102.

[46] M. Foucault, "Truth and Power", in *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 131-133; "Two Lectures, p. 93; *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 27-28; *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p. 60.

[47] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 28.

[48] Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir*, p. 32.

[49] Ellen K. Feder, "Power/Knowledge", in Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, p. 55. Feder refers to M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse of Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 182-183.

In Foucault's work, *pouvoir* must be understood in this dual sense, as both "power" as English speakers generally take it (which could also be rendered as *puissance* or *force* in French), but also as a kind of potentiality, capability or capacity. Power, Foucault tells us, must be understood to be more complex than a term like *puissance* conveys; it has multiple forms and can issue from "anywhere".[50]

Additionally, it is difficult to translate the composite "power/knowledge". Gayatri Spivak draws our attention to the "homely verbiness of *savoir* in *savoir-faire* [a ready and polished kind of 'know-how', in English], *savoir-vivre* [an understanding of social life and customs] into *pouvoir*". So "*pouvoir-savoir*" could mean "being able to do something – only as you are able to make sense of it".[51]

Foucault uses the composite term "power/knowledge" to refer to the relation between "power" and "knowledge" that genealogy unmasks. For example, a genealogical study shows that the explosion of discussion about sex in the Victorian age was due to a "type of power" that bourgeois society "brought to bear on the body and on sex".[52] It, thus, casts doubt on the "repressive hypothesis".[53] Genealogy demonstrates that "this power had neither the form of the law, nor the effects of the taboo"; rather, it operated by producing (different kinds of) sexuality and making it a defining characteristic

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[50] Feder, "Power/Knowledge", pp. 55-56.

[51] G. C. Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge", in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 34. Quoted in Feder, "Power/Knowledge", p. 56.

[52] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p. 47.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

of individuals.[54] Consequently, there emerged four "figures" who were simultaneously "objects of knowledge", namely, "the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult".[55] These were products of four strategies which "formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex",[56] to wit, the "hysterization of women's bodies", the "pedagogization of children's sex", the "socialization of procreative behavior" and the "psychiatrization of perverse pleasure", respectively.[57] So, far from being an historical fact, sexuality is "a historical construct"[58] («*un dispositif historique*»)[59]. Therefore, the real questions are whether prohibition and censorship are not forms of power rather than repression and whether all this discourse on sex is not itself part of the power it criticizes as "repression".[60]

However, Visker has pointed out the problematic nature of Foucault's genealogical project.[61] He argues that "If the connection between knowledge and power…is really attempting to express a condition of the possibility of knowledge and science in general, then the critique of the human sciences cannot consist in

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[54] *Ibid*., p. 47.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[56] *Ibid*., p. 103.

[57] *Ibid*., pp. 104-105.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 105.

[59] Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Vol. 1, p. 139.

[60] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, p. 10. For his suspicion of the notion of 'repression' see also Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 17-18 and 40.

[61] R. Visker, *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*, trans. C. Turner (London and New York: Verso, 1995), pp. 57ff.

accusing those sciences of a *liaison dangereuse* with power".[62] He then goes on to say that the hyphen between "power" and "knowledge" leads to a differentiation which ultimately breaks down the conjoining of the two terms. Visker identifies three attempts (on the part of Foucault) at differentiation. In the first attempt (what he calls "autre pouvoir, autre savoir") Foucault wishes to link a particular form of knowledge (viz. the human sciences) with a particular form of power. But in this way Foucault actually undermines the "power-knowledge" concept, since he seems to be saying that 'genuine' knowledge should break its link with power. For example:

> The great investigation that gave rise to the sciences of nature has become detached from its politico-juridical model; the examination, on the other hand, is still caught up in disciplinary technology.[63]

In his second attempt at differentiation Foucault, Visker argues, bases his critique of the human sciences on the fact that their link with power has a specific character which is not present in the natural sciences. "And the difference [of the hyphen's nature] is even so great that the concepts of power and knowledge could be said to have a different meaning – effectively (in the case of power) or possibly (in that of knowledge) – in each case."[64] In his third attempt at differentiation Foucault identifies an internal connection between "power" and "knowledge"; in that case, the individual is a *product* of power, "a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I

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[62] *Ibid*., p. 58.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 62. Visker quotes from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 227.

[64] Visker, *Michel Foucault*, p. 64.

have called 'discipline'".[65] Visker asks: "if one must speak of an internal connection [between "power" and "knowledge"], why should one then deny that the human sciences emerged from the prison?"[66] Similarly, Visker says with regard to confession: *Either* confession entails a power relation, in which case the play of seducing and being seduced brings a specific subjectivity into being; *or* seduction is itself a kind of corruption whereby the person who confesses is affected.[67] The foregoing considerations lead Visker to conclude that the nature of the "power-knowledge" concept undermines Foucault's genealogical project. In order to criticize the human sciences with regard to their application(s), Foucault must stress the repressive aspect of power. However, this is against his intentions, since the purpose of his genealogical studies has been to emphasize the productivity of power. But, were Foucault to place the emphasis on the latter, then his genealogy would be deprived of all critical potential. In addition, (regarding punishment) "if power (also) represses, then there is an instance which is repressed and, in that repression, its *originality* is infringed. For Foucault, this instance is the body".[68] Consequently, Foucault's genealogy confronts a problem that it should like to avoid; that is to say, it *assumes* – quite unwittingly – that there is a body prior to power. So Foucault falls back to pre-genealogical conceptions.[69]

Genealogy as Critique

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 67. Visker quotes from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 194.

[66] Visker, *Michel Foucault*, p. 69; he refers to Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 305.

[67] Visker, *Michel Foucault*, p. 87.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 71 (my italics).

[69] *Ibid.*, pp. 69-73.

I will now turn to look at Foucault's conception of *critique*. What is the relation between 'critique' and 'genealogy'? In his inaugural address at the Collège de France Foucault said that the analyses he would make would fall into two "sets": first, "the 'critical' section" would examine "the forms of exclusion, of limitation, of appropriation" and would show "how they are formed, in response to what needs, how they have been modified and displaced, what constraint they have effectively exerted, to what extent they have been evaded";[70] and, second, "the genealogical aspect" would "concern the effective formation of discourse either within the limits of this control, or outside them, or more often on both sides of the boundary at once".[71] Foucault proceeds to say:

> In truth these two tasks are never completely separable…The regular formation of discourse can incorporate the procedures of control, in certain conditions and to a certain extent (that is what happens, for instance, when a discipline takes on the form and status of a scientific discourse); and conversely the figures of control can take shape within a discursive formation…The difference between the critical and the genealogical enterprise is not so much a difference of object or domain, but of point of attack, perspective and delimitation.[72]

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[70] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", p. 70.

[71] *Ibid*., p. 71.

[72] *Ibid*., pp. 71-72.

Therefore, Foucault understood 'genealogy' and 'critique' as mutually complementary. In fact, critique is an integral part of genealogy; genealogy is a *critical* enterprise.[73]

Importantly, for Foucault, "A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are." Rather, "It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged modes of thought the practices that we accept rest."[74] The starting-point of critique is a "principle of reversal";[75] that is to say, critique turns our deep-seated conceptions upside-down. The task of Foucault's genealogy is to offer us a different *interpretation*, to make a different *perspective* known, in order to allow for the possibility of our becoming otherwise than we are. Foucault says:

> My general project over the past few years has been, in essence, to reverse
> the mode of analysis followed by the entire discourse of right from the
> time of the Middle Ages. My aim, therefore, was to invert it, to give due

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[73] For a discussion of three forms of critique as well as the sense in which Foucault's genealogy is a critique see R. Guess, "Genealogy as Critique", *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10 no. 2 (2002), pp. 209-215.

[74] M. Foucault, "Practicing Criticism", in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, trans. A. Sheridan and others, ed. L. D. Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 154. This interview was published in *Libération* under the title «Est-il Donc Important de Penser?» on 30-31 May 1981. An English translation under the title "So Is It Important to Think?" appears in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. R. Hurley and others (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 454-458.

[75] Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", pp. 67, 70.

weight, that is, to the fact of domination, to expose both its latent nature and its brutality.[76]

Following a reversal of the traditional conception of 'power', a genealogical analysis, rather than concerning itself with "the regulated and legitimate forms of power" (legal conception of power), locates power at the extreme points of its exercise, i.e. as it "invests itself in institutions" and "becomes embodied in techniques"; rather than treating power "at the level of conscious intention or decision", examines the point where it is invested – consciously or unconsciously – in institutions and practices; rather than seeing power as a possession, it studies power as a network; rather than deducing power starting from the top of the social pyramid in order to discover the extent to which it permeates the base ("descending" analysis of power), it conducts an "*ascending* analysis of power" by starting from its "infinitesimal mechanisms"; rather than considering power to be repressive or "ideological", it views it as productive.[77]

Foucault argued that, in order for *criticism* to be able to show that "things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such", it has to be "*radical*", viz. to operate *without* the mode of thought concerned (hence the "principle of reversal"). More significantly, it cannot be a matter "of there being a time for criticism and a time for transformation, nor people who do the criticism and others who do the transforming"; rather, "the work of deep transformation can only be carried out in a free atmosphere, one constantly agitated

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[76] Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 95.

[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 96-102. Cf. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 27-34. See also Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 94-96.

by a *permanent criticism*".[78] The task of genealogy as critique is to isolate the constraints *immanent* in a particular society and the possibilities of transformation (given those constraints or impediments); according to Foucault, "the important question" is "whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system".[79] Having identified the practices that restrain us, we will be able to resist them in order to *create* ourselves in our autonomy.[80] So it is important to note that, for Foucault, power presupposes resistance and vice versa.[81] And, as a commentator has said, "it is the *exercise* of resistance to power which is the form of freedom".[82] Therefore:

> resistance is the condition of possibility of genealogy. As such there is an immanent relationship between genealogy and resistance which expresses itself both in the *idea* of genealogy in so far as a concern with showing how we have become what we are is predicated on the possibility of being otherwise than we are and in the *practice* of genealogy as an investigation of how we can be otherwise than we are.[83]

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[78] Foucault, "Practicing Criticism", p. 155 (my italics).

[79] M. Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality", in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 294.

[80] Foucault owes this idea to Nietzsche.

[81] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, pp. 95-96; "Power and Strategies", p. 142; "The Subject and Power", in Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, pp. 211-212, 221-222, 225-226 – reprinted in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, pp. 329-331, 340, 342, 346-348.

[82] D. Owen, *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 161.

[83] *Ibid*., p. 162.

Some commentators, most famously, Jürgen Habermas and Nancy Fraser,[84] have criticized Foucault's genealogy on the grounds that it is unable to provide reasons why we should want to be otherwise than we are, i.e. to transform our practices.[85] It has been argued that analyses that merely point to the possibility of change without at the same time laying down a plan for change are simply evidence of the "young conservative" stance of some intellectuals.[86] However, these critics have misunderstood the nature and the objectives of Foucault's critical-genealogical project.[87] For Foucault rejects the idea of a normative foundation of resistance,

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[84] J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), IX and X; N. Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions", *Praxis International*, Vol. 1 no. 3 (1981), pp. 272-287 and *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

[85] Some critics have gone further, arguing that Foucault does make normative claims, although he does not acknowledge this; see, among others, C. Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth", *Political Theory*, Vol. 12 no. 2 (1984), pp. 152-183. In the Foucault/Habermas debate this charge is referred to as "crypto-normativity"; see J. Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again", in M. Kelly (ed.), *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 94-98.

[86] N. Fraser, "Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative?'", in M. Kelly (ed.), *Critique and Power*, pp. 185-210.

[87] For why thinkers working within the tradition of the Frankfurt School of Sociology have misunderstood genealogy see D. Owen, "Criticism and Captivity: On Genealogy and Critical Theory", *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 10 no. 2 (2002), pp. 216-230. Briefly: "Critical Theory as *ideologiekritik* is directed to freeing us from captivity to an ideology", whereas "genealogy is directed to freeing us from captivity to a picture or perspective" (*ibid*., p. 216). Owen responds to Habermas and Fraser in *ibid*., pp. 224-226, and suggests that "precisely insofar as these writers are working from

precisely because he associates it with the role of "the 'left' intellectual" (usually of the Marxist tradition) who supposedly is "master of truth and justice" and in this capacity prescribes to others what they have to do.[88] However, Foucault says:

> To say to oneself at the outset: what reform will I be able to carry out? That is not, I believe, an aim for the intellectual. His role, since he works specifically in the realm of thought, is to see how far the liberation of thought can make those transformations urgent enough for people to want to carry them out and difficult enough to carry out for them to be profoundly rooted in reality.[89]

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within the tradition of Critical Theory, their focus generates a blindspot concerning the issue of aspectival captivity which genealogy addresses" (*ibid.*, p. 226). For a discussion of Foucault's and Habermas's projects see D. Owen, "Foucault, Habermas and the Claims of Reason", *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 9 no. 2 (1996), pp. 119-138. For the Foucault/Habermas debate see S. Ashenden and D. Owen (eds.), *Foucault Contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue Between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London: Sage, 1999). For some objections to Foucault's genealogical accounts and responses thereto see also Cressida J. Heyes, "Subjectivity and Power", in D. Taylor (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, pp. 167-169.

[88] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 126.

[89] Foucault, "Practicing Criticism", p. 155. Cf. "The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so?...it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits…to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization…to participate in the formation of a political will…", Foucault, "The Concern for Truth", in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 265.

So, according to Foucault, the intellectual ought to abandon the role of *the* leader. On the contrary, he/she ought to confine him-/herself to a critique formulated by way of an historical analysis, whose aim would be to demonstrate that many postulates, *évidences*, institutions and ideas we take for granted are historical constructs, and that "we are much more recent than we think".[90] As Raymond Guess has said:

> In contemporary philosophical discussion the concept of normativity (along with the now almost automatically raised question concerning the 'normative implications' of every theoretical proposal) is surely the most important 'self-evident' notion that must be put into question. Foucault's work can be interpreted as an initial contribution to a *genealogy of normativity*, and his writings will remain highly relevant until such time as the task is fulfilled.[91]

For Foucault, the theoretical and political function of genealogy is to contribute important elements to the perception of things; if people want to, they can then use those elements in order to make their *own* political choices. Like Nietzsche, Foucault refused to legislate for others. Similarly, like Nietzsche, Foucault wished to use genealogy as an argument against *particular* possibilities that had become realities. Foucault followed Nietzsche in carrying out a *performative* model of *critique*.[92] Crucially, Foucault contrasted the "universal" to the "specific" intellectual. Whereas

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[90] Foucault, "Practicing Criticism", p. 156.

[91] Guess, "Genealogy as Critique", p. 213 (my italics for emphasis).

[92] See Owen, *Maturity and Modernity*, pp. 210-213 for the idea that Foucauldian genealogy performs an "exemplary critique". See also D. Owen, "Genealogy as Exemplary Critique", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 24 no. 4 (1995), pp. 489-506.

the former is concerned with positing universal norms (the model of *the* leader), the latter offers specific analyses and engages in "local" criticism and/or struggle.[93] By practising "local" criticism, genealogy allows "an *insurrection of subjugated knowledges*".[94] By "subjugated knowledges" Foucault means two things; first, "historical contents" or "historical knowledges" that "have been buried or masked" by "functional arrangements or systematic organizations" and, second, "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity".[95] Genealogy consists in

> a way of playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or nonlegitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter them, organize them into a hierarchy, organize them in the name of a true body of knowledge, in the name of the rights of a science that is in the hands of a few.[96]

For this reason Foucault famously insisted that genealogies are "antisciences".[97]

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[93] Foucault, "Truth and Power", p. 132. On the "*local* character of criticism" see also Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 81. Instances of local critique include the anti-psychiatric movement, challenges to morality and sexual ethics, as well as protests against the judiciary and the penal system; see Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, pp. 5-6.

[94] Foucault, "Two Lectures", p. 81.

[95] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 7.

[96] *Ibid*., p. 9.

[97] *Ibid*.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the paper I suggested that 'method' is a 'means' which, proceeding from certain presuppositions and operating within a clearly defined framework, aims at some specific goal; thus, method stands *midway of* an assumption (or hypothesis) and an end (or goal). To what extent, is Foucault's 'genealogy' a 'method' in this sense? In an interview Foucault said: "In this piece of research on the prisons, as in my other earlier work, the target of analysis wasn't 'institutions,' 'theories,' or 'ideology' but *practices*". The "hypothesis" was that "these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but, up to a point, possess their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence, and 'reason.'" And the goal ("the aim") was to grasp "the conditions that make these acceptable at a given moment".

> So I was aiming to write a history not of the prison as an institution, but of the *practice of imprisonment*: to show its origin or, more exactly, to show how this way of doing things…was capable of being accepted at a certain moment as a principal component of the penal system, thus coming to seem an altogether natural, self-evident, and indispensable part of it.

Therefore, "It is a question of analyzing a 'regime of practices' – practices being understood as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons

given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect".[98] This is the *method*, which Foucault calls 'genealogy'.

Foucault's genealogical history differs from traditional history, in that historians "take 'society' as the general horizon of their analysis, the instance relative to which they set out to situate this or that particular object…". By contrast, Foucault says:

> My general theme isn't society but the discourse of true and false, by which I mean the correlative formation of domains and objects and of the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear them; and it's not just their formation that interests me, but the effects in the real to which they are linked.[99]

One of these effects is to make "a category" appear as "self-evident". As a result, for example, historians "believe they can write a history of sexuality and its repression". Genealogy writes the history "of the 'objectification' of those elements historians consider as objectively given…". Foucault acknowledges that this is a philosophical problem that does not interest the historian. But, if he is "posing it as a problem within historical analysis", he is not "demanding that history answer it". Says Foucault:

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[98] M. Foucault, "Questions of Method", in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 3, p. 225.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

> I would just like to find out what effects the question produces within
>
> historical knowledge….it's a matter of the effect on historical knowledge
>
> of a nominalist critique itself arrived at by way of a historical analysis.[100]

Foucault's genealogies question such sociological categories as 'society' and the 'individual' by emphasizing their historical development. Even more, they *re*conceptualize the relationship between the 'individual' and 'society', as it has traditionally been understood. Since it emerged in the nineteenth century sociology has treated 'society' as a modern phenomenon, while 'individuals' were thought to have existed since the beginning of human history, organizing themselves in 'natural', face-to-face relationships. Foucault's genealogical histories show that the formation of 'individuals' has been *contemporaneous with* the formation of the 'social' or 'society'.

Evangelia Sembou

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[100] *Ibid*., p. 238.