Notes

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Genealogy as exemplary critique: reflections on Foucault and the imagination of the political

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Abstract

This paper suggests that genealogy (as it is elaborated and practised in the work of Foucault) is an exemplary form of critique. The stakes of this argument are established in the course of an initial response to critics of genealogy such as Habermas and Fraser (who claim that it involves a performative contradiction) through the distinguishing of legislative and exemplary forms of critique. The essay then goes on to to show how Foucault's central concern, namely, the relation of humanism and bio-power, leads him to articulate an ethics of creativity which exhibits an ethos of ironic heroization and discloses a conception of the political as *agon*. Reflecting on these features of genealogy's *saying*, it is argued that the form of genealogical reflection manifests these features. This emphasis on the *showing* of genealogy leads to the claim that Foucault's anti-humanism, mode of historical consciousness and perspectivism reproduce the substantive commitment of genealogy to the value of autonomy within the structure of genealogical reflection.

Keywords

Foucault; genealogy; exemplar; critique; politics.

Thought thinks its own history (the past), but in order to free itself from it thinks (the present) and be able finally to 'think otherwise' (the future).

Gilles Deleuze (1988: 119)

Is genealogy critical? If so, in what sense is it critical? In this essay, I will address these two questions. But why is this task necessary? To address this preliminary question, I will begin by briefly focusing on the critique of genealogy articulated by Habermas[1] before moving to elaborate the character of genealogy as a mode of critique by attending to its capacity to

on ourselves is that just as this activity aims beyond itself to the production of a certain kind of being – the self as work of art – so too it aims beyond itself to the production of relations of intersubjectivity which foster this mode of being. Ethics is always already politics. To develop this aspect of Foucault's thought further, we can address his comments on Baudelaire and the aesthetics of modernity.

'"You have no right to despise the present"' (Foucault 1984: 206): this Baudelairean precept expresses the rejection of a nihilistic contempt for the present in favour of a more complex relation in which our present-ness figures as an achievement which is both heroic and ironic:[9]

> For the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is. Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it.
>
> (Foucault 1984: 40–1)

If we transpose these general remarks into our concern with an ethics of creativity, what emerges is a conception of our self-relation as a practice of self-overcoming which seeks to engage with the constitution of one's subjectivity as an achievement whose heroic character ironically requires its transformation. This does not entail a frenzied or wanton transgression of limits. On the contrary, our respect for what we are, even as it impels us to transform ourselves, demands a reflective process involving a determination of those systems of constraint which most radically threaten to foreclose the possibility of transformatory activity (and, consequently, the possibility of a culture of heroic ironists). Thus Foucault comments:

> My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.
>
> (Foucault 1984: 343)

We can pertinently recall at this juncture Foucault's comment that 'a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don't have the means of modifying it' (Foucault 1988: 294). However, our recognition of the ground of human dignity in our capacity to become many things entails that 'it is the enhancement of struggle – not its mere production or exacerbation – [which] must form the criterion of political judgement' (Thiele 1990: 922). Foucault's use of the compound term 'ethico-political' in this passage refers us again to the recognition that our activity of self-overcoming is situated within our relations with others. Ethics is always already politics because the transgression and transformation of those social practices and rationalities which seek to foreclose the possibility of struggle

maintains both specific struggles and the activity of struggle *per se* or, to express the same point positively, our transgressive and transformatory practices constitute ourselves as heroic ironists and foster a culture of ironic heroization.

Thus, we may conclude that politics is the activity of struggle in which we produce and reproduce our freedom through its exercise. The distinctive understanding of the political which emerges from this account can be set in opposition to the reduction of the political to the technical which attends humanism. The space of the political is presented as the *agon*, the space of struggle, in which the question 'who are we?' remains perpetually open to negotiation and re-negotiation rather than being located as the site of a transcendent determination of our being. The specificity of our political modernity is revealed in the ethos of ironic heroization as '*our belonging to the questioning of that to which we belong*' (Coles 1991: 108). In other words, our political modernity lies in our belonging together as our belonging to the question 'who are we?' and our maturity lies in this belonging together as our belonging to the openness of this question.

In concluding this section of what genealogy *says*, we can summarize the features which genealogy must *show* if it is to be exemplary. Firstly, genealogy must show its commitment to an ethics of creativity. Secondly, genealogy must exhibit the ethos of ironic heroization. Thirdly, genealogy must embody the agonal concept of the political implicit within the aesthetization of ethics.

The showing of genealogy

In focusing on what is shown by genealogy, this section will attend to three aspects of genealogical reflection. Firstly, it will illustrate the relationship between Foucault's philosophical anti-humanism and an ethics of creativity. Secondly, it will show how the form of historical consciousness manifest by genealogy embodies the ethos of ironic heroization. Thirdly, it will argue that the commitment of genealogical reflection to a perspectival account of knowledge reproduces the agonal conception of the political immanent within an aestheticized ethics. In order to situate this series of concerns, we will begin by taking up the question of history noted in the opening section.

Integral to Foucault's rejection of the project of philosophical anthropology in favour of an engaged anti-humanism is a recognition of the implications of this move *qua* subjectivity:

> One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework.
>
> (Foucault 1984: 59)

This recognition finds its methodological expression in genealogical reflection which locates subjectivity as constituted through the interplay of

possibility and actuality *qua* the fields of possible practices opened up by forms of rationality and the realms of possible rationalities opened up by forms of practice. More precisely, we may say that the *actual* ways in which we constitute ourselves and others as subjects of knowledge govern the ways in which we can reflect on others and ourselves and, thereby, define a field of *possible* ways of acting on ourselves (ethics) and others (power); while, at the same time, the *actual* ways in which we act on ourselves (ethics) and others (power) govern the *possible* ways in which we can constitute ourselves and others as subjects of knowledge.

We can explicate what is involved in this analytical apparatus by drawing out the ideas of power, ethics and knowledge which are deployed within it. The concept of power, on Foucault's account, refers to a mode of action which acts on the actions of others by structuring their field of possible actions and can be conceptualized neatly in terms of the idea of the conducting of conduct. The concept of ethics refers to power exercised on oneself, that is, actions which act on one's own actions, a conducting of one's own conduct. The concept of knowledge refers to the ways in which we recognize ourselves and others as particular kinds of selves and others (wherein, moreover, the self is inseparable from its constitution as a certain kind of self). From these three concepts, Foucault develops the ideas of power/knowledge relations and ethics/knowledge relations. Power/knowledge relations refer to the conducting of the conduct of the other through the constitution of the other as a certain kind of other. Ethics/knowledge relations refer to the conducting of the conduct of the self through the constitution of the self as a certain kind of self.[10] Both power/knowledge relations and ethics/knowledge relations are 'only exercised over free subjects and only insofar as they are free' (Foucault 1982: 221) since both presuppose that the actions of individuals and collectivities are capable of being affected by the actions of other individuals and collectivities: 'There is no power without potential refusal or revolt' (Foucault 1988: 84). This elaboration of power/knowledge and ethics/knowledge relations leads Foucault to the following formulation:

> At the heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom. Rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an 'agonism' – of a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face to face confrontation which paralyses both sides than a permanent provocation.
>
> (Foucault 1982: 221–2)

We can unpack these comments by suggesting that 'the recalitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom' refers to the ethics/knowledge relations through which we conduct our conduct and that the 'agonism' to which Foucault refers denotes the contestation of these relations by power/knowledge relations.

What are the implications of the analytical apparatus of genealogy with respect to the question of history? Firstly, we may note that this 'agonistic' understanding of subjectivity presents autonomy as the resistance to power relations; the form of freedom is struggle. Secondly, we may also note that history as our becoming what we are is nothing other than the contestation of power/knowledge relations and ethics/knowledge relations (i.e., the judgements constitutive of our form of life), that is, the contestation of the social practices and rationalities within which our subjectivity is articulated. Consequently, we may conclude – as the passage offered in the opening section of this paper led us to suspect – that autonomy is the condition of possibility of history and, thus, the architectonic practical interest of genealogy. Having elucidated this topic, let us turn to the specific aspects of the showing of genealogy required to ground its exemplarity.

Our first concern attends the relationship between genealogy and an ethics of creativity. The crucial feature of genealogical reflection in this instance is its anti-humanism, that is, its displacing of the idea of the self as given and its instituting of the idea of the self as cultural artefact. In this context, we need merely note Foucault's comment that '[f]rom the idea that the self is not given to us, I think there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (Foucault 1984: 351) in order to suggest that anti-humanism entails an ethics of creativity. More formally, we may note that just as the humanist project of philosophical anthropology in presenting the self as given commits itself to an ethics of authenticity, that is, living the truth of the self, so the anti-humanist project of genealogy in presenting the self as constituted commits itself to an ethics of creativity, that is, making the self a work of art. This is simply to say that an ethics of creativity exhibits an anti-humanist grammar (although we may also note that the practice of genealogy as a contestation of the epistemological grammar of humanism is itself the intellectual correlate of practical struggles with the technical grammar of biopolitics).[11]

Our second concern is related to genealogy and the ethos of ironic heroization; this issue calls on us to examine the form of historical consciousness manifest by genealogy. We can begin by noting that, in the essay 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history', Foucault suggests that, in dispensing with the idea of the constituent subject and the metaphysical correspondence theory of truth, genealogy eschews the very idea of a suprahistorical perspective. As a consequence of this eschewal, effective history (genealogy) entails a reformulation of the relation between proximity and distance exhibited by traditional history:

> It reverses the surreptitious practice of historians, their pretension to examine things furthest from themselves, the groveling manner in which they approach this promising distance (like the metaphysicians who proclaim the existence of an afterlife, situated at a distance from this world, as the promise of this reward). Effective history studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as to seize it at a distance (an

such as autonomy through a exemplification of its commitment to this value; to borrow a comment of Lyotard's on judgements of taste, we might say that each genealogy 'carries with it the promise of universalisation as a constitutive feature of its singularity' (Lyotard 1988: 38).

In the context of this aesthetic sensibility, the ruling virtue is integrity insofar as it is integrity as the consonance of saying and showing which constitutes exemplarity and, thereby, the entitlement to claim authority. In advocating an ethics/politics of exemplarity in which integrity proves itself through contestation and in showing this ethics/politics through such contestation, genealogies do not abnegate political and intellectual responsibility but constitute themselves as exemplary exemplars of engaged and committed thought.[13]

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Notes

1   I take up this critique simply because it has achieved a widespread currency, not to say hegemony, within debates on Foucault's significance for social and political theory. In effect, this essay is an attempt to articulate a counter-hegemonic struggle over the terrain of 'critique'. An alternative strategy would be simply to oppose genealogy to critique, that is, simultaneously surrender to the hegemony of the Kantian-Hegelian tradition and attempt to outflank it, yet a war of position seems more appropriate in the context of Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas 1987).

2   This case is argued at length in my book *Maturity and Modernity: Nietzsche, Weber, Foucault and the Ambivalence of Reason* (Owen 1994a) and I draw on materials developed there in this essay.

3   For a detailed reading of Nietzsche on this topic, see Owen (1994a: chs 2–4) in which Nietzsche's transformation of Kantian critique is articulated through a posing of the question of the necessity and value of synthetic *a priori* judgements.

4   I am simply adopting Wittgenstein's distinction between saying and showing here, although Heidegger's distinction between the Said and the Saying would serve equally well in this context. In another paper, I develop a similar account of Nietzsche's work as exemplary (Owen 1994b).

5   It should be noted that these constructions are ideal-types. Thanks to Sam Ashenden for pointing this out to me.

6   Thus the significance of the logical problem of types may be seen as part and parcel of the technical desire to produce a stable foundation/structure for humanist knowledge and technologies of bio-power. It would be interesting to examine the emergence and development of the problem of types in the context of the development of liberal technologies of government.

7   I consider only the first two of these doubles since these tie into the two accounts of power which Foucault explicitly addresses although this does not imply that an account could not similarly be developed for the third double.

8   This position is elaborated in the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche 1969) in which Nietzsche attacks the metaphysical version of the correspondence theory of truth. This does not entail for Nietzsche (nor for Foucault) that we abolish or surrender the idea of truth but that truth is refigured within an aesthetic sensibility as contextual (embedded and embodied).

9   The thematics of the heroic and the ironic in Foucault remain underexplored with respect to political theory. In many ways I would suggest that this combination articulates an implicit critique and overcoming of both Arendt's emphasis on the heroic and Rorty's emphasis on the ironic – but this argument awaits another essay.

10   The idea of ethics/knowledge receives elaboration in terms of a methodological analytic – the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the ethical work, the telos – which specifies the ontological, deontological, ascetic and teleological aspects of ethics/knowledge relations. This analytic can also be applied to power/knowledge relations (Owen 1994a: 159), while we should note that these four dimensions correspond to Aristotle's four types of cause. My thanks to Henry Tudor for pointing this latter connection out to me. At the second 'Foucault and Politics' conference 'Alternative Political Imaginations and Logics of Contestation', Mitchell Dean also argued for the generalizability of Foucault's ethical analytic around the notion of government.

11   To further support this point, we can note that following his comment on the consequences of the self as not given to us, Foucault suggests – contra Sartre – that one's relation to oneself should be viewed as a creative activity and it is this insight which receives methodological articulation in Foucault's ethical analytic.

12   With respect to this struggle, it is interesting to note the following comment of Max Weber's:

> the values to which the scientific genius relates the object of inquiry may determine, i.e., decide the 'conception' of a whole epoch, not only concerning what is valuable but also concerning what is significant or insignificant, 'important' or 'unimportant' in the phenomena.
>
> (Weber 1949: 82)

13   After finishing this essay, I discovered that the distinction which I have drawn in it is close to the distinction between interpretative and legislative reason articulated by Zygmunt Bauman in his essay 'Philosophical affinities of postmodern sociology' (Bauman 1992: 114–48) and more generally in his books *Legislators and Interpreters* (Bauman 1987) and *Intimations of Postmodernity* (Bauman 1992). However, despite this similarity, I think that this emphasis on exemplarity may reveal a topic elided in Bauman's distinction in terms of how authority is constituted. Still, although not consciously drawing on him in this essay, I must acknowledge the general intellectual debt I owe to Bauman's work.

References

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Deleuze, G. (1988) *Foucault*,

It is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but that of whomever) introduces itself into history and gives it the breath of life. A delinquent puts his life into balance against absurd punishments; a madman can no longer accept confinement and the forfeiture of his rights; a people refuses the regime which oppresses it. This does not make the rebel in the first case innocent, nor does it cure in the second, and it does not assure the third rebel of the promised tomorrow. One does not have to be in solidarity with them. One does not have to maintain that these confused voices sound better than the others and express the ultimate truth. For there to be a sense in listening to them and in searching for what they have to say, it is sufficient that they exist and that they have against them so much which is set up to silence them. . . . All the disenchantments of history amount to nothing: it is due to such voices that the time of men does not have the form of an evolution, but precisely that of a history.

(Foucault 1981: 8)

The significance of these remarks, at least insofar as they are coherent with the methodological stance of genealogy, is to suggest that it is autonomy as the exercise of resistance to power which constitutes human time as historical time. This position consequently entails that resistance to power relations is *the* condition of possibility of genealogical activity and, thus, establishes autonomy as the architectonic practical interest of genealogy.

The central issue exhibited by this discussion in terms of the project of critique is that the genealogical refusal of critique as a project of legislation does not entail nihilistic despair, an act of surrender to power or the cowering of right before might but rather refigures critique as a project of exemplification. Genealogy cannot legislate autonomy for us, it recognizes no grounds on which such an act of legislation could be secured, but it can (and does) exemplify its commitment to the value of autonomy in the form of its reflection on our present, that is, in terms of what it *shows* as well as in terms of what it *says*.[4] In the context of Foucault's location of the historical relationship between the framing of the figure of the (post)modern intellectual and the figure of the Jewish prophet (Foucault 1988: 124), we might recall Max Weber's distinction between legislative and exemplary prophets *and* his charting of the transformation of the discourse of authority into the authority of discourse in order to suggest that while our modernity refigures the theological authority of the prophet as the rational authority of intellectual discourse, it retains the distinction between acts of legislation and acts of exemplification as forms of constituting authority.

In reflecting on this distinction between legislative and exemplary modes of critique, we can recall other ongoing encounters within the philosophical arena – Hegel contra Nietzsche and Marx contra Weber spring most readily to mind – which may lead us to suspect that this particular distinction signals a more fundamental distinction between dialectical and agonal styles of reasoning. However, be that as it may, in the remainder of this paper I want to draw out the commitments of an exemplary mode of critique by focusing on precisely how genealogy as historical ontology exemplifies its commitment to autonomy and on the conception of the political which emerges in this activity of exemplifcation. To facilitate this task, I will begin by examining the form which the genealogical concern with autonomy takes in terms of what it *says* before attending to genealogy in terms of what it *shows* and finally reflecting on the *integrity* of genealogical critique.

The saying of genealogy

This section will focus on what genealogy *says* by attending to the thematics of humanism and bio-power which provide Foucault's genealogies with their central problem, namely, the connection between the growth of our capacities and the intensification of power relationships. It will then proceed to illustrate how Foucault's concern with the *ethos* of modernity leads him to elaborate an ethics of creativity and a politics of struggle as a way of disconnecting the development of our capacities from the proliferation of power relations.

In *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault presents two *exemplars* – the panopticon and the confessional – of an emerging modality of power which conducts the conduct of individuals and collectivities through a scientific discourse of norms. Foucault locates the constitution of panoptic and confessional technologies as exemplars of modern power in terms of the development of a political rationality which combines a secular individualizing principle of pastorship (the shepherd-flock game) with a rational totalizing principle of statehood (the city-citizen game).[5] In order to clarify the problem posed by bio-power and humanism for human autonomy, we can begin by focusing on these exemplars and the kinds of practices and discourses they entail.

To initiate discussion we can note that panoptic and confessional technologies link individualization and totalization at the level of knowledge through the construction of 'types' such as the *delinquent* and the *hysterical woman* by reference to a norm, where the construction of such types marks the intersection of tactics of individualization (e.g., the case history) and of totalization (e.g., statistics). It may be noted further that the construction of types through these technologies itself allows for an ever-increasing refinement of these technologies through the proliferation of types of types (e.g., Ferrus' classification of types of delinquent).[6] This 'feedback' feature of panoptic and confessional technologies emerges when we note that, through the construction of types, both of these technologies link individualization and totalization at the level of practice insofar as they function as 'laboratories of power' instituting regimes of discipline through which regulatory controls are articulated, while these regimes themselves rearticulate the domain of regulation.

Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on.

(Foucault 1984: 343)

On this reading, the epistemological grammar of humanism and the technical grammar of bio-power secure each other's hegemony. As Dreyfus and Rabinow acutely note:

Bio-power spread under the banner of making people healthy and protecting them. Where there was resistance, or failure to achieve its stated aims, this was construed as further proof of the need to reinforce and extend the power of experts. A technical matrix was established. By definition there ought to be a way of solving any technical problem. Once this matrix was established, the spread of bio-power was assured, for there was nothing else to appeal to: any other standards could be shown to be abnormal or to present merely technical problems. We are promised normalization and happiness through science and law. When they fail, this only justifies the need for more of the same.

(Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982: 196)

In the context of this identification of bio-power and humanism as the practical and theoretical articulations of the reduction of the political to the technical in modern culture, genealogy confronts the question of how the relationship between the development of our capacities and the intensification of power relations which is entrenched by bio-power and humanism can be breached. It is with respect to this question that Foucault seeks to elaborate an anti-humanist ethics.

Foucault's deployment of an anti-humanist ethics is developed through his focus on the *ethos of modernity* which is manifested in Baudelaire's notion of *dandysme*:

The deliberative attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism. To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of passing moments; it is to take oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration. . . . This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself.

(Foucault 1984: 41–2)

The significance of *dandysme* is that it opposes an ethics of creativity to an ethics of authenticity. Consequently, this ethics displaces the form of self-relation predicated on authenticity and truth through which the 'double bind' of modern subjectivity is articulated, that is, it disconnects the 'feedback' relation between the growth of our capacities and the intensification of power relations by undermining the pursuit of the 'truth' of the self and, concomitantly, the authority of 'truth' to determine our being. On the one hand, insofar as our self-relations (ethics) are formulated in terms of a discourse of truth, this entails our recognition of the authority of truth-tellers to legislate norms and values for us; consequently, the politics of humanism is articulated through competing discourses of truth and, thus, the legitimacy of the claims to authority made by various experts, their entitlement to legislate for us. What remains constant in the politico-epistemic grammar of humanism is this *logic of legislation* whereby we are subjected to determinations of our nature or identity which constrain our capacity to transform ourselves. On the other hand, by rupturing the politico-epistemic grammar of humanist judgement and displacing it with a politico-aesthetic grammar, Foucault's ethics of creativity undermines both the figure of the expert as legislator and the logic of legislation which denotes the 'double bind' of humanism – its simultaneous commitment to, and undermining of, the space of freedom. Thus far however we have only elaborated the negative implications of an ethics of creativity *qua* humanism and its reduction of the political to the technical; what is needful is a positive specification of this ethics and the idea of the political immanent within it. To fulfil this task, we need to focus on the form of asceticism which characterizes this ethics and the *telos* which defines its parameters.

Foucault locates the *practique de soi* of anti-humanist ethics in terms of the idea of self-overcoming: of overcoming the identities to which we are subjected, of transforming the judgements to which we are subjected. On the understanding of autonomy immanent within this ethics '[o]ne's dignity is not that one *is* something, but that one may *become* many things' (Thiele 1990: 919). In taking up this stance, Foucault is both specifying his Nietzschean commitment to autonomy as self-overcoming yet also transforming our understanding of the activity of self-overcoming. As Thiele notes: 'Foucault politicized what Nietzsche had internalised: the will to struggle' (Thiele 1990: 923). This position exhibits itself in Foucault's situating of the 'agonism' of power and freedom in terms of social practices and rationalities or, more precisely, in the struggles through which social practices and rationalities are produced, reproduced and transformed. The Nietzschean concern with self-overcoming as the struggle against the submission of subjectivity is thereby reproduced as the struggle against the forms of subjection embodied in humanist rationalities and the practices of bio-power. This 'politicization' of self-overcoming implies that the activity of self-overcoming takes the form of transgressing social practices and rationalities, that is, self-overcoming is thoroughly situated within relations of intersubjectivity. To explore the implications of the intersubjective situatedness of this ascetics of self-overcoming, we need to focus on the *telos* of this activity, namely, the constitution of the self as a work of art.

By locating our activity of self-overcoming within historically contingent relations of intersubjectivity, Foucault may be read as claiming that our becoming-in-the-world is always already a becoming-with-others. The significance of the intersubjective situatedness of our ascetic/aesthetic labour

However, the constitution of the panopticon and the confessional as exemplary diagrams of power within the political rationality which Foucault terms 'bio-power' should not cause us to overlook their differences in terms of the relationship between the forms of disciplinary practice through which they operate and the forms of knowledge which they generate (and which articulate their operation). In the case of panoptic technologies, the disciplinary focus is provided by the body as subject to causative processes such that abnormal or dysfunctional elements within the constitution of an individual's *nature* may be overcome or re-aligned through regimes of training. In other words, this technology operates through the external environment of the individual and constitutes a form of knowledge which specifies the individual as a determined object. In the case of confessional technologies, the disciplinary focus is provided by the self as the site of meaning such that abnormal or dysfunctional elements within the constitution of an individual's *identity* may be overcome or re-aligned through regimes of interpretation. In other words, this technology operates through the internal environment of the individual and acts to produce a form of knowledge which specifies the individual as a free subject. Thus, the figure of knowable man is constituted as (determined/known) object and (free/knowing) subject through panoptic and confessional technologies respectively; while the institutional entrenchment and elaboration of these technologies provide the loci of emergence of the structural and interpretative human sciences respectively.

On this account, the practices and techniques of bio-power serve to constitute the epistemological grammar of humanism, yet we must also note that the development of humanist knowledges secures the spread of bio-power. This reciprocal relation becomes apparent when we reflect on the humanist question 'What is Man?' as providing an epistemic imperative which is simultaneously an ethical and political imperative. The epistemic imperative manifests itself in the paradoxical task of modern philosophy as the attempt to think 'the identity and difference of the positivities, and of their foundation, within the figure of the *Same*' (Foucault 1970: 315). In *The Order of Things*, Foucault suggests that this task is articulated through three doubles – the transcendental/empirical, the *cogito*/unthought, the retreat and return of the origin[7] – which repeat in turn the epistemic instability of the figure of 'Man'. Yet the attempt to think the transcendental/empirical double in which 'Man' both constitutes the phenomenal world and is himself constituted as phenomenon is also the attempt to think 'Man' as both lawgiver and subject of law; the epistemic imperative to reconcile the transcendental and the empirical is refigured as the ethical and political imperative of realizing autonomy, that is, overcoming heteronomy. Similarly, the attempt to think the *cogito*/unthought double in which 'Man' both appears as 'an experiencing subject and the never fully understood (indeed, always somehow misunderstood) object of the experience' (Gutting 1989: 203) is also the attempt to think 'Man' as both authentic and alienated (inauthentic); the epistemic imperative to

think the unthought is refigured as the ethical and political imperative of overcoming alienation. Foucault comments:

> The whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought – of reflecting the contents of the *In-itself* in the form of the *For-itself*, of ending man's alienation by reconciling him with his own essence, of making explicit the horizon that provides experience with its background of immediate and disarmed proof, of lifting the veil of the Unconscious.
>
> (Foucault 1970: 327)

In both cases, the political correlate to the epistemic imperative involves an account of power. In recognizing 'Man' as both lawgiver and subject of law, the political imperative towards autonomy is articulated through a juridical understanding of power as illegitimate (i.e. heteronomous) constraint. In situating 'Man' as both authentic and alienated, the political imperative towards autonomy is articulated through a radical understanding of power as alienating (i.e. heteronomous) constraint. Moreover, we may also note that in both instances the relationship between epistemic imperative and its political correlate involves a commitment to the radical disjunction of truth and power insofar as both accounts predicate truth on autonomy and identify power with heteronomy. How though does this epistemic-political conjuncture (and the accounts of power which emerge within it) secure the practical technologies of bio-power?

On Foucault's account, the two central features of humanism as an epistemic-political project are, firstly, that, because it posits the radical disjuncture of truth and power, humanism cannot recognize those exercises of power which operate through truth or, more precisely, through the human sciences and, secondly, that because humanism identifies truth and autonomy, it elaborates ethical relations in which the achievement of autonomy is tied to obedience to the authority of truth (or, as Nietzsche would put it, the ascetic ideal)[8] and, concomitantly, the reduction of political judgement to the technical deliberation of experts. The consequences of this 'double bind' are made manifest in Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis. In this hypothesis, the identification of power as that which represses our authentic (sexual) identity produces a politics of resistance which takes the form of an endless desire for liberation which, in turn, calls for ever deeper and more refined confessional techniques; yet it is precisely these techniques for constituting ourselves as authentic beings which enable the normalization of our conduct, that is, the conducting of our conduct through scientific norms. Thus the dilemma posed by humanism is that precisely insofar as it seeks to elaborate an ethics and politics which is grounded in a determination of the 'truth' of 'Man' (that is, a project of philosophical anthropology), it ties the development of our capacities to the intensification of power relations – yet the epistemological grammar of humanism rules out by fiat any alternative form of ethics or politics. As Foucault comments:

motivate resistance to contemporary complexes of power/knowledge relations and examining the concept of the political which it elaborates and exemplifies.

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The question of critique

What do we mean by critique? This is a complex and contested topic yet, for post-Kantian social and political thought, it is possible to situate the sense of critique as the pursuit of *maturity* through reflection on *modernity*[2] where this reflection is articulated via a historical reconstruction of our being in the present. Thus, while Kant's critical enterprise is concerned with our maturity, it is only after Kant that the activity of critique becomes historical and the question of maturity (what is the possibility of achieving autonomy given the conditions of the present?) is tied to the question of modernity (what is the character of our historical being in the present?). It is this conception of critique which engages Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* and it is in elucidating this conception that Habermas makes the following claim:

> Hegel inaugurated the discourse of modernity. He introduced the theme – the self-critical reassurance of modernity. He established the rules within which the theme can be varied – the dialectic of enlightenment.
>
> (Habermas 1987: 52)

From this claim – which is both historical and philosophical – Habermas goes on to illustrate that the Nietzschean tradition (if one may call it that) does not play the game of critique by Hegel's rules and, since Hegel's rules are constitutive of the game on Habermas's account, can therefore be reasonably dismissed from the philosophical playing field. Indeed, much of Habermas's energy in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* is devoted to showing that such philosophical delinquents as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault should not only be barred from the playing field but also prevented from coaching from the touchline.

The ferocity of Habermas's critique of the practitioners of genealogy grounds its legitimacy, its violent dismissal of these thinkers, in the claim that their attempts to provide a non-dialectical form of critique contribute to the formation of a fashionable culture of nihilism and an irrationalist politics of neo-conservativism (Habermas 1987). The heart of this critique is formulated with an uncharacteristic economy in Habermas's claim that genealogy is incapable of answering the question 'why fight?'; a point repeated by Nancy Fraser's description of genealogy as a mixture of empirical insights and normative confusions (Fraser 1989). More specifically, the critical claim elaborated by Habermas and Fraser is that Foucault's genealogies are caught up in a performative contradiction in that, while they appeal to autonomy, they provide no grounds from which the legislation of autonomy as a universal norm might be enacted. Consequently, if our discussion of genealogy as a form of critique is to have any meaning, it is necessary to provide at least a *prima facie* case for the capacity of genealogy to answer the question 'why fight?'. This task appears to be immediately compromised by adducing Foucault's own utterances on the role of the intellectual; for example:

> The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions, and programs that intellectuals have managed to formulate over the last two centuries and whose effects we can now see.
>
> (Foucault 1988: 265)

Foucault's Nietzschean scepticism towards the idea of the intellectual (genius) as universal legislator – a scepticism which assumes Humean proportions – appears to rule out both the possibility and desirability of genealogy grounding its critical capacities in an act of normative legislation. Having reached this impasse, it appears that to make the case for genealogy as a mode of critique requires that we ask whether Habermas is justified in assuming that legislation is the exclusive form of critique.

In reflecting on this question, let's recall that the etymology of the concept 'critique' derives from the Greek term for judging – it is this derivation which informs Kant's use of the idea of critique as the judging of judgements. In this context, we may recall Nietzsche's concern with the contingency and effects of our 'synthetic *a priori* judgements'[3] and note Foucault's characterization of his genealogical enterprise as 'to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident is no longer accepted as such' (Foucault 1988: 155). Practising criticism, on Foucault's account, is 'a matter of making facile gestures difficult' (Foucault 1988: 155). Thus, for Nietzsche and Foucault, genealogy involves rendering the entrenched cultural judgements which constitute our form of life up for judgement by exposing their contingent character and reflecting on their practical effects. Such critical activity is 'absolutely indispensable' for any transformation of our form of life: 'A transformation that remains within the same mode of thought, a transformation that is only a way of adjusting the same thought more closely to the reality of things can merely be a superficial transformation' (Foucault 1988: 155). In other words, critical activity is integral to the possibility of practical transformation insofar as it problematizes the 'grammar' of thought or, more precisely, of judgement constitutive of our form of life and offers us an alternative grammar. Moreover, and this is the crucial point, this act of rendering up, and transforming the grammar of, our constitutive judgements is structured in terms of a concern for autonomy. More formally, we might claim that autonomy is the architectonic practical interest of genealogical activity. To ground this claim, we can note that a condition of possibility of genealogical practice (as an investigation of the historical contingency of how we have become what we are) is that our time, human time, has the structure of a history. In this context, consider the following remarks:

approach similar to the doctor who looks closely, who plunges to make a diagnosis and to state its difference).

(Foucault 1984: 89–90)

Genealogy is 'reflection on "today" as difference in history' (Foucault 1984: 38). Thus, with respect to the ethos of ironic heroization, we can note that it is in grasping our being in its proximity that genealogy heroizes the present, while the gesture of 'abrupt dispossession' constitutes the distance which ironizes this heroization. More specifically, genealogy's moment of heroization lies in its disclosure of what we are – the difference of modern subjectivity – while the moment of irony lies in its showing how we have become what we are – the sheer contingency of our being what we are. By focusing on the question 'in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints' and transforming 'the critique conducted in the form of a necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression' (Foucault 1984: 45), genealogy presents itself as 'an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted by the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it' (Foucault 1984: 41).

Our third topic is the relation between genealogy and an agonal conception of the political. To reflect on this issue, we can note that a second consequence of genealogy's eschewal of the claim to a suprahistorical perspective is that genealogy 'refuses the certainty of absolutes' and, thereby, deprives us of the forces of reassurance offered by 'an apocalyptic objectivity' (Foucault 1984: 87); it acknowledges the contingency of what we are and 'confirms our existence amongst countless lost events' (Foucault 1984: 89). Genealogy situates itself as a product of the historical process it is engaged in investigating; its perspectives are immanent to the historical process and acknowledge their partiality. In other words, genealogy is committed to a perspectival account of knowledge. The implications of this commitment are twofold: firstly, as already noted in our discussion of the issue of history, genealogy recognizes itself as a perspective constituted by a formal interest in autonomy and, secondly, genealogy recognizes that, within this general perspective, the formal interest in autonomy may be 'filled in' from a number of specific perspectives, that is, a number of different substantive interests (or determinations of the 'main danger'). Consequently, with respect to the agonal conception of the political, we can note that any genealogy is involved in both a formal *agon* in which it contests both with perspectives which refuse to recognize their perspectival character and with perspectives whose interest is other than autonomy *and* a substantive *agon* in which different judgements of significance vie with each other.[12]

In the context of this discussion, we can also take up a set of comments which Foucault makes concerning the relation of genealogy to the public:

R. Rorty points out that in these analyses I do not appeal to any 'we' – to any of the 'we's' whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a 'we' in order to assert the principles one recognises and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a 'we' possible by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the 'we' must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result – and the necessarily temporary result – of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it.

(Foucault 1984: 385)

In this passage, the activity of critique is presented as the activity of forming a 'we' – a community of judgement – characterized by a questioning of what is taken for granted as universal, natural, etc., that is a 'we' which takes the form of a questioning of who we are. Thus, we can note that any given genealogy is both concerned with constituting a formal community of judgement in which we belong together as our belonging to the question 'who are we?' and a substantive community of judgement concerned with the contestation of a specific determination of their essential natures or authentic identities. Furthermore, we should also note such substantive communities are contingent contextual constructs which form to address specific issues and dissolve into other communities and coalitions as struggles transform the terrain of struggle. In other words, in recognizing its own situated character, genealogy recognizes that it is always already beginning again – the question 'who are we?' remains an open arena of contestation. Genealogy exhibits the political modernity and maturity which it recommends.

In this section, it has been argued that genealogy exemplifies what it says: firstly, it was shown that Foucault's anti-humanism exemplifies an ethics of creativity; secondly, it was argued that the historical consciousness of genealogy exhibits the ethos of ironic heroization; thirdly, it was noted that the perspectival character of genealogy reproduces the agonal conception of the political. It was also argued that genealogy's attempt to constitute communities of judgement manifests the political modernity and maturity which genealogy recommends. We can conclude by recalling that genealogy concerns itself with rendering judgement up for judgement and noting that genealogy exhibits this very relation to itself in which an evaluative judgement of significance (taste) subjects itself to the rigorous deliberations of historical reflection and offers itself up for judgement – as a promise and a gift.

Conclusion: the integrity of genealogy

The argument of this essay is that genealogy is a form of exemplary critique. Unlike Habermas's attempt to find a transcendental ground of authority which entitles his theory to legislate the procedures through which we come to legislate valid norms for ourselves, genealogy seeks to recommend values

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On metaphors of suffering: mapping the feminist political imagination

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Abstract

This article suggests that the contemporary feminist imagination is informed by
the ways in which feminist argumentation has drawn upon notions of race, black-
ness and slavery as approximations of the condition of womanhood. The moral
weight that is lent by such analyses might be rendered as inaccurate, opportunistic
or even racist. However, rather than a rejection of such arguments as simply 'wrong'
(which would involve some mode of evaluation) it is also possible to suggest that, at
the same time, one might reread the decisions involved in making such arguments
as metaphors; and if metaphors are, as Ricoeur suggests, imaginative moves that
operate not in spite of but through difference, then these arguments can be
regarded as making and marking a rhetorical space that has frequently been
threatened by the erasure of the very argument it sets out to achieve. Such a reading
pulls apart the purity of gendered suffering and exposes the decisions to argue
in this mode as moments in the creation of a political community that has had a
history the term 'feminism' necessarily elides. It is that creation of community,
the processes of becoming historic, that requires monitoring for its problematic
incorporations.

Keywords

This is finite history – and there is perhaps no other kind. It is a matter of
the space of time, of spacing time and/or of spaced time, which gives to 'us'
the possibility of saying 'we' – that is, the possibility of being 'in common',
and of presenting or representing ourselves as a community – a commu-
nity that shares or that partakes of the same space of time, for community
itself is this space.

(Jean Luc Nancy 1993: 151)

Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on
the chaos of memories. More than that: the chance, the fate, that suffuse