

## Foucault's anti-humanism

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Foucault's work can be fruitfully interpreted as an extended meditation on the role which humanism has played in the social sciences. The theme of this meditation is expressed – somewhat metaphorically – in the following, rather apocalyptic, passage concerning the 'end of Man,' which concludes *The Order of Things*. 'Man's' appearance, Foucault writes,

...was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had long remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge ... Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event ... were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. [Foucault, 1973:387]

The obscurity of this passage can be lessened somewhat with a few comments. By 'Man,' Foucault does not mean human kind, but rather a particular view of human cognitive processes which takes them to be open to a kind of empirical investigation which can both provide a ground for knowledge and explain behavior. This view, which Foucault refers to as 'humanism,' is, he claims, of recent origin, a product of the particular 'arrangement of knowledge,' which he refers to as 'the modern episteme.' According to Foucault, this humanistic episteme is coming to an end.

It is not clear from this passage if Foucault believes that this disappearance will come about as a result of intellectual criticism, or as the result of some other, perhaps unconscious, process.

(Marx, of course, is similarly ambiguous in his predictions.) However, much of Foucault's work can be read as a direct criticism of humanism, seemingly intended to bring it down. In this essay, I intend to critically read all of his work in this light. Such a single-minded reading risks distorting his ideas. However, because Foucault's anti-humanism is so central to his philosophy, and because it raises so many interesting philosophical questions about the social sciences, as well as so many interesting interpretive questions about Foucault's work, such a reading is worthwhile.

Although the theme of anti-humanism is constant throughout Foucault's work, his criticisms of humanism – indeed, his conception of humanism – changed dramatically during his career. Several commentators, not realizing this, have failed to properly appreciate his contribution [Major-Poetzl, 1983]. To avoid the pitfalls of this non-historical understanding, I will treat Foucault's arguments chronologically, tracing the development of his conception of humanism and his attack on it.

## I

Most philosophers, including the young Foucault, would understand humanism to be a theory which attempts to explain social relations and social facts in terms of the unchanging features of the human subject. As this is not the only form of humanism, I will use the term 'explanatory humanism,' to refer to this particular form. Any form of the explanation of behavior which rests on an appeal to 'human nature' is humanistic in this sense. Explanatory humanism is a kind of essentialism: an essentialism which usually takes 'reason' to be fundamental to human nature. In effect, explanatory humanism is a philosophical project which, if successfully completed, would allow us to explain in principle most or all social phenomena, as well as the private behavior of individuals. For this to be done, the theory must be given empirical content through the adoption of auxiliary hypotheses which specify in detail the character of reason. When explanatory humanism is so completed, it becomes an empirically falsifiable theory. Explanatory humanism implies a certain proper form of explanation: All complete explanations of social phenomena will

terminate in an appeal to human nature. Moreover, as human nature is unchanging, a certain uniformity in social behavior is to be expected. Therefore, explanatory humanism also implies an underlying uniformity in fundamental social processes.

One example of this kind of humanistic social theory would be classical Political Economy, which, with its constant appeals to the rationally self-interested individual, and its pretensions of being a universally valid science, clearly involves a form of rationalistic essentialism. Moreover, this is not the only example of humanistic social theories; many nineteenth century 'social sciences' rested directly on some notion of human nature. On the other hand, I believe that an examination of modern social theory would show that, unlike earlier social theories, it is relatively free of any obvious simple and direct appeal to human nature. Modern social theory is too sophisticated to make such a questionable move. However, as Foucault is right to point out, many social sciences do depend on disguised appeals to related notions [Foucault, 1973:250–299]. In addition to this, many modern epistemological theories are based on a similar idea [Foucault, 1973:303–343]. Thus, Foucault's attack, although explicitly aimed only at early forms of psychotherapy, is relevant to contemporary social sciences.

His attack on explanatory humanism takes the form of an empirical counter-example to the humanist project as it appeared in psychology. Foucault presents his counter-example in *Madness and Civilization*, a book which purportedly is a history of madness. The book can perhaps be best understood as a reply to Dostoevsky, who Foucault quotes as saying, 'It is not by confining one's neighbor that one is convinced of one's own sanity' [Foucault, 1965:ix]. In fact, as Foucault tries to show, this is precisely how we convince ourselves of our sanity. More importantly, Foucault argues, it is through the process of confining and treating the insane that we come to define madness, and conversely, sanity.

This idea, that madness and reason are internally related, or are in 'dialectical opposition,' predates Foucault's work. Foucault traces it as far back as the 'Classical-age,' (1650–1800) which conceived of madness as

... perfectly expressed in the word 'unreason:' the simple, immediate reverse side of reason; and this empty, purely negative

form, possessing neither content nor value, which bears the imprint of a reason that just fled, but which remains for unreason the *raison d'être* of what it is. [Sheridan, 1980:31]

However, for Foucault, the relation between madness and reason is more complex than this, for madness is not just the conceptual opposite of reason, but it is also what might be called its 'administrative opposite.'

Madness, as Foucault shows in his history, is not a simple object. It has undergone many changes since the end of the Middle-ages and the first appearance of a 'ship of fools,' with which Foucault begins his history. Not only has the conception of madness changed since that period, but so have the phenomena of madness, its symptomology. One might add, parenthetically, that they are still changing [Sennett, 1976]. Moreover, according to Foucault, these changing conceptions are a function of broader social changes which are not usually thought related to madness [Foucault, 1965]. These changes — in law, morals, medicine and criminology — have this effect because they lead to changes in the treatment of madness, which, in turn, lead to changes in the phenomena of madness, as well as in the established conception of it. Thus, the treatment of madness is logically prior to both our current conception of it and to its current symptomology. Moreover, because of the conceptual and administrative relationships between madness and sanity, it is, in part, through the administration of madness that we define, construct and administer reason.

It is possible to construct an argument against humanism from these ideas. If reason and madness are interrelated as Foucault presents them, and if his history is reasonably accurate, then humanism is false: Humanism takes reason to be unchanging, but if madness changes, then given this interrelationship, so does reason, but if madness is, in part, a function of its administration, as Foucault argues, and if madness and reason are interrelated, then reason, too, is a product of social administration. Finally, if madness has changed throughout history, as Foucault believes, then, given the interrelationship, reason must also have undergone change. Explanatory humanism entails an essentialism of reason, but if Foucault's arguments and histories are correct, reason, because it is the changing product of social practice, cannot be the human essence.

While this argument is interesting and novel, it is not convincing, as it can be attacked in two ways. The first line of attack charges that Foucault's arguments are based on a confusion between madness and the appearance of madness. Because of this confusion, it is possible to share Foucault's belief that throughout history there have been a variety of regular systematic changes in the symptoms and conception of madness which have come about as a result of distant social changes, without being committed to the view that madness itself has changed. That is to say, it is possible that there is an underlying reality to madness that remains unchanged beneath the changing surface phenomena which Foucault has documented. If this is the case, then the various changes in the phenomena of madness do not entail that madness itself changes. Thus, even granting the relationship between reason and madness, this may give no support to the claim that reason is a product of social arrangements, or that reason itself changes. If one keeps separate the reality of madness from its appearance, then there is no reason to abandon explanatory humanism, even granting the rest of Foucault's position.

Although this line of attack seems promising, a response to it is available. It is possible to argue that nothing underlies madness, as madness is exhausted by its appearance. If the language of noumena and phenomena is inappropriate to madness (and reason), then the falsity of explanatory humanism would follow from Foucault's history of appearance. Moreover, there may be reason to reject this language. However, as Foucault does not make such an argument at this point, I will not pursue this possible response.

The second way in which a humanist might respond to Foucault's argument is to evade it. This can be done in two ways. First, a humanist could point out that the force of Foucault's argument is limited to those forms of humanism which take reason to be the human essence. Therefore, even granting the soundness of Foucault's arguments, the humanist would be free to continue his project as long as some other characteristic is identified as constituting human nature. Some modern explanatory humanisms, such as sociobiology, have taken this route.

The humanist could also evade the force of Foucault's argument by changing the nature of the humanistic project. Historically, this has been what happened. Unlike earlier 'social sciences,'

modern social theories do not directly use humanistic assumptions. Rather, humanism has become a meta-theory. Humanism has become the self-conception of the social sciences, which defines and justifies their practices. By the time that Foucault wrote *The Order of Things*, he had come to recognize the new role of humanism, and had modified his arguments accordingly.

Foucault first conceived of humanism as a general form of explanation in the social sciences, a form that terminated in assumptions describing 'rational human nature.' His argument against this 'explanatory humanism' took the form of an empirical counter-example. This argument is weak because it depends on a possible confusion between the reality of mental states and their appearance, and also because its limited force is easily evaded.

## II

I will refer to the more modern form of humanism as 'epistemological humanism,' to draw attention to its changed function. Modern humanism is less a general schema for the explanation of social phenomena, than it is a mode of self-understanding for the social sciences. Thus, humanism has been transformed from a universal form of explanation to a philosophy of the social sciences. Essential to this philosophy is the view that knowledge can be criticized and justified by an appeal to a form of foundationalism which seeks to ground knowledge in (empirically ascertainable) 'human nature,' in 'Man.' Epistemological humanism is a form of foundationalism in which the foundations of knowledge are to be discovered through quasi-empirical investigations. This view can be summarized in three theses: (1) Knowledge has indubitable foundations. (2) These foundations are a function of the essential characteristics of human cognitive processes. (3) These characteristics can be discovered through a philosophico-empirical investigation of those processes.

This investigation has been carried out by a set of sciences which Foucault refers to as 'the human sciences.' These sciences, Foucault mentions history, linguistics, ethnology and psychoanalysis, seemingly overlap the domain of the social sciences proper, but their focus is somewhat different. For Foucault, these

sciences are not simply concerned with the gathering and explanation of social facts. Rather, their subject is the cognitive processes which make knowledge possible. Therefore, the human sciences are closely related to the various modern humanistic philosophies, which include, according to Foucault, Positivism, Phenomenology, Marxism, Structuralism and Hermeneutics [Foucault, 1973:303–343]. These philosophies and sciences are united, again according to Foucault [1973:387], by the central importance which they assign to the ‘figure of Man.’ In less idiosyncratic language, it might be said that what unites them is the view that knowledge can be grounded in the essential characteristics of humanity which can be discovered by the human sciences through empirical investigation. Thus, the human sciences are self-reflective.

It is important to understand that the focus of this project is the development of an adequate epistemology, not the explanation of behavior. This includes the behavior of scientists. In *The Order of Things*, the first of Foucault’s books addressed to this form of humanism, a book which takes the form of a history of what have been misleadingly termed ‘the immature sciences’ [Hacking, 1979], Foucault explicitly refuses to explain any of the disruptive, revolutionary changes which his history uncovers. Epistemological humanism does not seek to explain behavior, but to understand knowledge. This is not to say that it has not been used to explain behavior. Epistemological humanism has given rise to many general quasi-humanistic explanatory social sciences such as Marxist and Phenomenological Sociology. Moreover, it has often been used to explain, in particular, the behavior of scientists and other intellectuals. This latter attempt at explanation, under the name of the ‘history of ideas,’ is the subject of a direct attack by Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

The history of ideas, according to Foucault, is that form of history that reintroduces (and always assumes) a suprahistorical perspective: a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed develop-

ment. The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. [Foucault, 1977:152]

In short, the history of ideas is a teleological history of reason. It is humanistic because it attempts to discover through historical investigation a rationality which not only underlies and explains the historical development of science, but which also can be used to justify current scientific practice. Foucault thinks that this form of history is flawed, not only as justification but also as explanatory history. To understand why, it is helpful to consider the work of a philosopher who was not discussed by Foucault, but whose work, I believe, perfectly exemplifies this approach.

Imre Lakatos [1978:121–138] argued that the history of science could be used to decide between proposed methodologies of science, that the history of science could be used to 'test' current methodologies of science. It was Lakatos's belief that the methodology which offers the best 'rational reconstruction' of the history of science is the best methodology for modern science and should be accepted as the best account of reasoning for contemporary science. This methodology should, therefore, be used to guide science, to distinguish science from non-science, and to justify science. Thus, the empirical investigation of science can be used to guide and ground knowledge. This project is humanistic in both senses of the term so far distinguished. Let us consider it as an explanation of scientific history.

According to Lakatos, we do not have direct access to the history of science. We cannot construct a history of science merely by discovering the facts of history. The history of science is the history of reason, but this history is not pure. Science is part of society, and is subject to social influences which divert it from its true path. Often these social influences cause scientists to make mistakes, to accept false facts, and to embark on non-scientific projects. Therefore, in writing the history of science, we must distinguish between two complementary histories, internal history and external history. The internal history of science is the story of science as the rational unfolding of knowledge. It would be a history of the progress of reason, in which the rational events in the history of science would be explained by an appeal to (perhaps unconscious) rational choice. External history, on the other



hand, is the history of the residue; of error, mistake, and miscalculation. It would explain, through reference to social factors, all the irrational breaks in the internal history.

The distinction between internal and external histories is essential to Lakatos's form of historical explanation. It is used not only to determine the domain of the history of science, but also to determine the kind of explanation which will be given to each particular event in that history. However, clearly the distinction must be based on a theory of reason, or, in Lakatos's terminology, on a scientific methodology. Therefore, scientific methodologies must act as historiographic theories, which allow us to reconstruct the internal history of science, and to distinguish that history from the external [Lakatos, 1978:118–121].

The histories that result from Lakatos's historical methodology will share a common feature; they will be discontinuous. The history of science will not be smooth. There will be a tendency for science to move in jumps. During its 'rational' phases it will develop in a way consistent with the rational methodology. But, unfortunately, until society becomes more perfect, it will often insert itself into this development, causing irrational (but not necessarily harmful) breaks [Lakatos, 1978:118–121]. Thus, the history of science will be a history of continuous development punctuated by irrational discontinuities.

It is at this point that the criticisms that Foucault levels against the history of ideas becomes important. His criticism is directed at these 'unities,' these periods of development and their explanation. He writes of these periods that

it is at once apparent that such a unity, far from being given immediately, is the result of an operation ... The *oeuvre* [period of continuous rational development] can be regarded neither as an immediate unity, nor as a certain unity, nor as a homogeneous unity. [Foucault, 1972:24]

Foucault believes that these unities are the result of an interpretation and should not naively be thought of as existing in history. However, in effect, this is exactly to what Lakatos's approach commits him.

In order for Lakatos to claim that it is possible to test methodologies by reference to the history of science, he must suppose that that history is accessible independently of those methodolo-

gies. He cannot escape this requirement, even by using the methodologies to serve as meta-methodologies [Lakatos, 1978:122–136]. In the end, the best methodology is the one which gives the most consistent reading of the history of science as the history of reason. That is, the best methodology is the one which shows the history of science to be the history of uninterrupted rationality. However, this begs the question of the rationality of science in two ways. First, it assumes that the history of science has been the history of rational development. Second, it assumes that that methodology which produces the ‘longest rational history’ is, in virtue of that fact, the best description of rationality. More importantly, however, this approach makes the mistake of attributing causal efficacy to an interpretive instrument. It assumes that the methodology which serves as the basis of an interpretation is the cause of the interpreted event.

Lakatos’s explanations are circular, because they beg important questions. They are also teleological, because they use the result of a process (the methodology which emerges from this argument) to explain the process. Finally, they are misleading, because they make it appear as if there is a single mental entity which underlies and explains a variety of changing phenomena. This explanatory motif, of reality and appearance, so common in the physical sciences, is of questionable value in psychology, where interpretation plays a central role.

These criticisms can be generalized. Together, they apply to the ‘history of ideas’ in general, which, according to Foucault, ‘assumes a suprahistorical perspective ... [assumes that] ‘consciousness is always identical to itself’ [Foucault, 1977:128], and assumes questionable ‘unities’ and ‘explanatory schemes’ [Foucault, 1972:24]. Finally, it should be pointed out that in this last criticism of the history of ideas, Foucault is outlining a position which might allow him to meet the criticism of his argument in *Madness and Civilization*, discussed in the previous section. Humanism is, therefore, not useful as a general form of explanation, nor as an explanation of the behavior of intellectuals. To argue this is not to imply that it cannot serve as a justification of knowledge. Foucault, however, does argue this very point.

### III

Foucault's argument against epistemological humanism proper, as it appears in *The Order of Things*, is, in essence, an argument against the three foundationalistic theses listed above. For this form of foundationalism to succeed, Foucault believes, it must be possible to show that the facts discovered by the empirical investigations of 'Man,' facts which apparently place limits on his knowledge – he refers to these limits as 'Man's Positivities' – can serve as the foundations – 'fundamentals' – of knowledge. The central project of epistemological humanism is to show that the positivities are 'identical' or 'the same as' the 'fundamentals.' Foucault christens this project, 'the analytic of finitude.'

As epistemological humanism is a philosophical project, and not a particular theory, it might be expected that there have been many attempts to demonstrate this identity. Foucault, in a chapter entitled, 'Man and His Doubles,' confirms this. There, he discusses the various modern humanistic philosophies, ranging from Positivism to Hermeneutics. The theme of his discussion is that all these attempts have failed. This discussion, however, is striking in its lack of arguments.

To understand Foucault's strategy at this point, it is necessary to understand the problems which any attack on foundationalism faces. First, such attacks create a dilemma. Either such an attack must be launched from a position external to the foundational theory which it attacks, or it must position itself 'within' that theory, in order to show that it is inconsistent. If it adopts the former course, it seemingly implies that the theory from which the attack is launched, is at least as well-grounded as the theory attacked. This implication conflicts with the intended outcome of the attack. Far from refuting foundationalism, an external attack recreates the foundationalist position on firmer grounds. On the other hand, the internal approach is necessarily limited to the particular form of foundationalism which it attacks. This kind of attack can only show that a particular attempt to formulate a foundationalistic theory fails, not that the project itself is wrong. Foucault, however, is seeking a general argument against foundationalism.

In addition to this problem, any attack on foundationalism

faces another problem. It is common to present relativism, even skepticism, as the alternative to foundationalism. Thus, for many, a successful attack on foundationalism would necessarily imply the truth of a pernicious relativism that would spell the end to all forms of serious intellectual endeavors. Thus, if Foucault is successful in his current project, and if he wants to continue doing philosophy in the broadest sense of that term, he must produce an argument against foundationalism which will not immediately raise the specter of pernicious relativism.

These problems lead Foucault to offer a novel argument. He does not launch a philosophical attack on epistemological humanism, rather he subjects it to a kind of psychological analysis. *The Order of Things* is, in effect, a form of psychotherapy. The clue to the fact that it is a therapeutic work can be found in Foucault's use of the term, 'repetition,' which is borrowed from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. There, Freud [1959] discusses the 'compulsion to repeat.' Freud believes repetition to be a complex phenomenon. Not only is it the foundation of play and the cause of some neuroses, but it is also essential to successful therapy. Freud believes that the original function of repetition is to allow the child to master unpleasant situations or experiences, to grow-up. However, Freud stressed that repetition can become neurotic if it does not result in the mastery of the disturbing situation. If repetition does not lead to such a mastery, but is continued only because the process itself lessens anxiety, then it is compulsive [Freud, 1959:38–39].

It is Foucault's view [1973:315] that the history of epistemological humanism is a history of failure, where each failure to complete the analytic of finitude, serves only to inspire another attempt. The search for foundations has become a 'monotonous] ... journey which, though it probably has no end, is nevertheless perhaps not [at each stage] without hope.' Foucault's history of humanistic philosophy, inadequate as a philosophical account, may be adequate as a history of a compulsion, in which the central theme, the failure of the humanistic foundational project, is rehearsed first in one form and then in another [Foucault, 1973:314].

However, as Freud points out in reference to therapy, insight into the compulsive nature of repetition is often not enough to

effect a cure. It is often necessary for the patient to re-experience in the controlled therapeutic environment the situation that the repetition has failed to master. To effect a cure, the patient must be lead through one more repetition. This time, however, the therapist does not intend the repetition to allow the patient to master the troubling experience, but to pass beyond it [Freud, 1959:38–39]. Thus, if Foucault is to cure the humanist of his compulsion to ground knowledge in human nature, he must not only portray the humanist's project as compulsive, but, in order to convey a 'sense of conviction [in] the correctness of the construction that has been communicated' [Freud, 1959:39], he must allow the humanist to therapeutically repeat the attempt to identify the positive with the fundamental so as to transcend it.

This strategy explains the structure of *The Order of Things*, a book which can be divided into three parts; a short introduction, a long history of the three 'immature sciences,' and the short section in which Foucault draws attention to the compulsive nature of the analytic of finitude. It is the long central section which is of interest. What is the purpose of this history? Why does it occur in a philosophy text? I believe that its function is to serve as evidence in an argument against the foundational use of structuralist theory, against a humanist structuralist epistemology. Foucault chose to examine structuralism, not because this theory provided the humanist with his strongest case, such that a refutation of this attempt would be tantamount to a refutation of the humanism project itself, but because structuralism was what was current in Paris at the time that Foucault was writing, and therefore what might, upon examination, provide the greatest therapeutic value.

This is not the place to consider this argument in detail, however, in brief the argument is this [Foucault, 1973:303–343]. If structuralism is to play a role in the analytic of finitude it must be possible to show that the structures discovered in discourse by empirical investigation, structures which limit knowledge, must be capable of grounding knowledge. That is, it must be the case that this structure must be capable of serving as, in Foucault's words, 'the law of what it is possible to say' [Foucault, 1973: 298–299]. However, the very diversity of structures, documented in great detail, which Foucault discovers in his history, are evi-

dence that there is no such law, no one 'structure of structures' [Piaget, 1970:134]. The plurality and incommensurability of these structures, by threatening relativism, undercuts the attempt to ground knowledge. Therefore, this attempt to ground knowledge in a structure uncovered by historical investigation, this attempt to complete the analytic of finitude, fails.

Foucault's argument against structuralism, it should be stressed, is not part of an argument that the humanist project is an impossible one. Such an argument, given the indefinitely large number of possible forms this project can take – of which Foucault has only considered a few – would itself be impossible. Rather, it is a therapeutic project, intended to lead the reader beyond humanism by showing that project to be futile. As such, Foucault's work can be criticized on several grounds. First, objections might be raised to Foucault's anti-structuralist argument; to his characterizations of structuralism as a humanism, to his history of the immature sciences, and to his inability to find a universal structure. As these objections are not central to Foucault's project, however, I will not discuss them here.

Second, an objection might be raised to the very attempt to treat a philosophical project as a psychological problem. Such a treatment, it might be argued, does not give the philosopher reason to alter his beliefs. This objection, however, misses the possible force of Foucault's position. Foucault chose not to make a direct argument against humanism. Instead, he raised the question as to when such an argument is needed. By questioning the rationality of the humanist project, he has raised a question about the nature of philosophical reasoning.

Some philosophers, influenced by Positivism, have held that a philosopher must only respond to arguments – and nothing else – which are sound, absolutely convincing, and presuppositionless. Others, aware of the difficulties of the positivist program, have despaired of meeting this high standard. Moreover, there is good reason to believe that philosophical argument does not conform to this model. As Kuhn [1970] has pointed out with respect to science, well-entrenched metaphysical systems are never disproven (or proven) by such arguments. Philosophy changes – and changes rationally – through other means than just logical argument. Clearly, the process of philosophical reasoning, as revealed in his-

tory, cannot be reduced to formal logic. Foucault, however, although he seems to share Kuhn's view, and despite all of his self-reflection, never articulated a theory of philosophical reasoning. It is difficult, therefore, to know how Foucault would defend his therapeutic approach to humanism. It is, as yet, unclear as to whether philosophical reasoning should resemble psychotherapy, as Foucault's work implies. The lack of argument on this point is one of the central weaknesses of Foucault's work. However, even if we grant to Foucault the validity of his approach, it is still possible to question the effectiveness of his therapy.

A final objection might be made to Foucault's project; that his therapy is a failure; that after reading Foucault in this light, the reader may still not be cured of his desire to complete the analytic of finitude. If we adopt the insight of Kuhn, that an old position can be justifiably abandoned, only if an attractive new position is available, it is possible to criticize Foucault's therapy on the grounds that it has not presented us with an alternative to the humanist project. Such an alternative, according to Kuhn, must be interesting, viable, and it must not immediately fall victim to the same problems as does humanism. In order to judge Foucault's therapy, therefore, we must examine his alternative to humanism.

During his archaeological period, Foucault did not have a viable alternative. What he proposed, the description of epistemes was so rife with problems [Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:79–100], that Foucault soon abandoned it. He replaced it with what he called 'genealogy.'

#### IV

Genealogy is not just Foucault's alternative to humanism. It is also a continuation of Foucault's analysis of humanism. By the time that Foucault came to develop his genealogical views, however, he had become convinced not only that humanism is false, but that it is obviously false. Thus, in his later work he no longer develops anti-humanistic arguments. This does not mean that he ignores humanism, however: The fact that humanism is false does not imply that it is a 'mere' mistake, a non-entity, to be ignored. To paraphrase Foucault, 'The individual subject that humanism

seeks to analyze is neither the real atomistic basis of society nor the ideological illusion of liberal economic theory, but an effective artifact of a very long and complicated historical process' [Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:120]. Thus, humanism, while false, has played an important role in the development of society. One goal of genealogical analysis is to understand the historical development and social function of humanism, as an effective artifact or effective ideology. It is as an ideology that humanism makes its last appearance in Foucault's work. Genealogy might be thought of as the analysis of 'ideological humanism.'

Genealogy is, therefore, a continuation of Foucault's anti-humanist critique, but it is not a purely negative continuation. Humanism is no longer a theory to be disproven, or a project to be rejected, but a part of social practice to be understood. Moreover, this attempt to understand humanism, this genealogy, is the alternative project whose inherent interest might draw intellectuals away from the humanistic compulsion. Unfortunately, Foucault died before he could formalize his genealogical method. However, he did write a short article, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' [Foucault, 1977:139–164], contrasting genealogy with the history of ideas, as well as several books in which he undertook specific genealogical analyses [Foucault, 1980]. It is from these works that we must form our conception of his new method.

In Foucault's words, genealogy is 'a history of the present,' that is, it is an attempt to understand current social practices through an understanding of their history. In this way genealogy resembles the history of ideas. It differs, however, in that genealogical history, as opposed to the history of ideas, makes no appeal to a transcendental subject. Thus a genealogical history attempts to give a radical social reading of history, in which the forms of both subjectivity and knowledge are to be explained by reference to social practice. Thus, genealogy rests on two claims which would seem to follow from Foucault's anti-humanistic arguments. The first claim is that there are no essential features of the human subject that are important in understanding human behavior. 'Human nature' is socially constructed. The second claim is that knowledge cannot be grounded in the human subject, but rather is itself socially constructed.

The claim that 'human nature' is a social product naturally



raises the question as to how this product is produced. No doubt, there are a number of ways to produce subjects. Foucault, however, is interested in only one mode of subject-production, the modern mode, in which subjects are produced by 'normalizing discipline.' 'Normalizing discipline' is the name Foucault gives to a particular kind of modern social power exercised by the several social practices which have sometimes been grouped together under the phrases, 'the helping professions' or 'the therapeutic professions.' These professions would include social workers, doctors, psychologists, criminologists, police, educators, sex therapists, judges, juvenile authorities and factory efficiency experts. According to Foucault, these professions, together with the social sciences which they are all associated, form a new and powerful kind of social institution which plays a dominant role in the shaping of the modern subject. In studying them, as they have developed in response to distant social causes, Foucault hopes to understand how modern 'human nature' developed.

This brings us back to humanism. It is clear that a humanistic worldview has been closely associated with the social sciences and with normalizing discipline. Not only have these practices helped shape humanism, but humanism has played a role in the development of these practices. Humanism has been the ideology of these practices. Humanism has both justified and obscured the fact that these practices have acquired substantial social power. But humanism has also helped form the knowledge-justifying practices of these professions. It has suggested lines of research and functioned as an ethical theory [Foucault, 1973:322–328]. Conversely, the social sciences, as they have produced knowledge about 'Man,' have acted to modify humanism. As one of the functions of genealogy is to study the historical constitution of the modern subject, one of its central themes must be the social function of humanism [Foucault, 1980].

The other central theme of genealogy is the social constitution of knowledge. This naturally follows – for the humanist, at least – from the first theme; if the subject is socially constructed, then so must be knowledge. Knowledge, for Foucault, is not the result of free activity of the transcendental subject, but is rather the product of powerful social practices:

Truth is not outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a

myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits ... Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint ... Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is ... mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements ... By truth, I mean, ... the ensemble of rules by which the true and the false are separated. [Foucault, 1972b:131–132]

Thus, genealogy takes the form of an historical investigation of the development of the modern subject and modern 'rules of truth.' It will focus on the social sciences, because, Foucault believes, they are the domain in which this process is occurring. It does not use the humanistic notion of a 'deep' subject, underlying the phenomena, but rather it studies the visible body and the surface rules of discourses and practices.

Such a study can be very enlightening, as Foucault has demonstrated. It can lead to interesting insights and enhance our understanding of the social sciences. However, serious philosophical questions can be raised as to its status. Is it possible to develop a surface history of the social sciences without falling into a self-defeating behaviorism in which truth claims would be inaccessible? Can genealogy avoid, on the other hand, falling into a new form of humanism? Can a philosophy of historical research be developed, both to replace that of humanism and to support genealogical analysis? Finally, what is the genealogy of genealogy? It is not possible to answer these questions in this, already over-long, essay. Yet they must be answered if genealogy is to be a vital alternative to humanism. As it stands Foucault has succeeded in problematizing humanism, and has suggested an interesting method of studying humanism. Whether or not this new method will allow us to escape humanism depends on whether or not other researchers take up genealogical analysis — and produce valuable results — and on whether or not philosophers can successfully clarify the genealogical project.

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