



Introduction

Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky appeared, some years ago, on a Dutch television program for a debate on the topic "Human Nature: Justice versus Power." The two thinkers never quite engaged in the agonistic sparring that such occasions are ideally supposed to produce, but some striking differences were clearly articulated. Although both men are highly critical of the current social and political order, their fundamental assumptions about the nature of human beings, about power and justice, and about how to understand such matters differ radically. Let me use this exchange as a means of introducing some of the elements of the work of Michel Foucault.

For Noam Chomsky, there is a human nature. This point is fundamental: unless there is some form of relatively fixed human nature, true scientific understanding is impossible. Starting from his own research, Chomsky asked: How is it that on the basis of a partial and fragmentary set of experiences, individuals in every culture are able not only to learn their own language, but to use it in a creative way? For Chomsky, there was only one possible answer: there must be a bio-physical structure underlying the mind which enables us, both as individuals and as a species, to deduce from the multiplicity of individual experiences a unified language. There must be, Chomsky insists, a "mass of schematisms, innate governing principles, which guide our social and intellectual and individual behavior . . . there is something biologically given, unchangeable, a foundation for whatever it is that we do with our mental capacities." Chomsky's scientific career has been devoted to uncovering these structures. His aim: a testable mathematical theory of mind. His lineage: Cartesian rationality.

Michel Foucault rejects Chomsky's view of both human na-

ture and science. In a methodologically typical fashion, Foucault avoids the abstract question: Does human nature exist?, and asks instead: How has the concept of human nature functioned in our society? Taking the sciences of life during the eighteenth century as an example, Foucault draws a distinction between the actual operational categories within a specific discipline at a particular historical moment and those broad conceptual markers such as "life," or "human nature," which, in his opinion, have had very little importance in the internal changes of scientific disciplines. According to Foucault, "It is not by studying human nature that linguists discovered the laws of consonant mutation, or Freud the principles of the analysis of dreams, or cultural anthropologists the structure of myths. In the history of knowledge the notion of human nature seems to me mainly to have played the role of . . . designat[ing] certain types of discourse in relation to or in opposition to theology or biology or history." Foucault is highly suspicious of claims to universal truths. He doesn't refute them; instead, his consistent response is to historicize grand abstractions. In the last analysis, he doesn't take a stand on whether or not there is a human nature. Rather, he changes the subject and examines the social functions that such concepts have played in the context of practices "such as economics, technology, politics, sociology which can serve them as conditions of formation, of models, of place, etc. . . . what [it is] in social forms that makes the regularities of science possible."²

For Foucault, there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society. His strategy is to proceed as far as possible in his analyses without recourse to universals. His main tactic is to historicize such supposedly universal categories as human nature each time he encounters them. Foucault's aim is to understand the plurality of roles that reason, for example, has taken as a social practice in our civilization not to use it as a yardstick against which these practices can be measured. This position does not entail any preconceived reduction of knowledge to social conditions. Rather, there is a consistent imperative, played out with varying emphases, which runs through Foucault's historical studies: to dis-

cover the relations of specific scientific disciplines and particular social practices.

A parallel set of differences between Chomsky and Foucault emerges in their discussion of politics. The interviewer asks each man why he is interested in politics. Chomsky answers by returning to other dimensions of universal human nature and reason. In his opinion, there is a universal human need for creative work and free inquiry. The possibility of satisfying this need is stifled in our society. Given modern technology and science, Chomsky argues, the means are currently available to overcome the alienation and drudgery of labor. If this has not been accomplished, the fault lies not in science but in the social and political organization of our society. The real problem we must confront, therefore, is a political one: how to bring about the just society in which creativity and reason would reign. Our job is to "try to create the vision of a future just society; that is to create, if you like, a humanistic social theory that is based, if possible, on some firm and humane concept of the human essence or human nature."³ For Chomsky, the end of political action is clear—or will become so—because it is guided by reason and human nature. The task of intellectuals is to use the concept of human nature as a standard against which to judge society and to use their reason to formulate a precise conceptualization of a more humane and just social order. Our political tasks can be coherently informed by the universals of reason and justice.

Foucault, typically, refuses to answer why he is interested in politics. He finds this both trivial and self-evident. Instead, he shifts the "why" question to a "how" question—how am I interested in politics? Certainly not, he parries, "by imagining an ideal social model for the functioning of our scientific or technological society." One of the hallmarks of Western political philosophy, in Foucault's interpretation, has been its devotion to such abstractions, first principles, and utopias—i.e., theory. In the West we have consistently approached the problem of political order by building models of the just social order or searching for general principles by which to evaluate existing conditions. But, Foucault claims, it is exactly this emphasis, this "will to knowledge," that has left us almost totally in the dark

about the concrete functioning of power in Western societies. Our task is to cast aside these utopian schemes, the search for first principles, and to ask instead how power actually operates in our society. "It seems to me," Foucault expounds, "that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them."⁴

But why should we fight against political violence? Again, Chomsky and Foucault differ. For Chomsky, we must struggle against the injustices of our current society in the name of a higher goal—justice. Surely, Chomsky argues, unless we have a guiding principle, we will have no way of judging the actions of others. It is perfectly possible that we may find ourselves in a situation in which a revolution turns out to be worse than the regime it replaces. Unless we have some fixed and rational standards for judging what constitutes a better society, we will be lost. This does not mean, Chomsky adds, that we have to achieve a perfect enactment of these standards, but unless we have them we will have no way to act or judge.

Foucault disagrees. And it is in this disagreement that Foucault is his most radical and disconcerting. He says: "I will be a little bit Nietzschean about this . . . it seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power . . . one can't, however regrettable it may be, put these notions forward to justify a fight which should . . . overthrow the very fundamentals of our society."⁵ Foucault is being consistent here. He is not saying that the idea of justice should never be invoked in a political struggle. But his basic metaphor is one of battle and not conversation. The point of engaging in political struggles—and Foucault thinks we are engaged in them all the time, hence his disdain for the question about the importance of politics—is to alter power relations.

For Foucault, knowledge of all sorts is thoroughly enmeshed in the clash of petty dominations, as well as in the larger battles which constitute our world. Knowledge is not external to these

fighters; it does not constitute a way out of, or above, the fray in the way Chomsky views it. Rather, for Foucault, the "will to knowledge" in our culture is simultaneously part of the danger and a tool to combat that danger. Following Nietzsche, Foucault asserts that knowledge did not "slowly detach itself from its empirical roots, the initial needs from which it arose, to become pure speculation subject only to the demands of reason. . . . Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge."⁶ Foucault confronts this challenge, this threat, by refusing to separate off knowledge from power. His strategy has been to focus his work, both political and intellectual, on what he sees as the greatest threat—that strange, somewhat unlikely, mixing of the social science and social practices developed around subjectivity.

Foucault calls this attempt to locate historically and analyze the strands of discourse and practices dealing with the subject, knowledge, and power "the genealogy of the modern subject." What is distinctive about Western culture is that we have given so much importance to the problem of the subject in our social, political, economic, legal, philosophical, and scientific traditions. Foucault's most general aim is to "discover the point at which these practices became coherent reflective techniques with definite goals, the point at which a particular discourse emerged from these techniques and came to be seen as true, the point at which they are linked with the obligation of searching for the truth and telling the truth."⁷

The Problem of the Subject

Let us follow Foucault in a recent self-characterization in which he says, "the goal of my work during the last twenty years has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."⁸ His schema of three modes of objectification of the subject provides a convenient means to present briefly the main themes of his work.

The first mode of objectification of the subject is somewhat

cryptically called "dividing practices." The most famous examples from Foucault's work are the isolation of lepers during the Middle Ages; the confinement of the poor, the insane, and vagabonds in the great catch-all Hôpital Général in Paris in 1656; the new classifications of disease and the associated practices of clinical medicine in early-nineteenth-century France; the rise of modern psychiatry and its entry into the hospitals, prisons, and clinics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and finally the medicalization, stigmatization, and normalization of sexual deviance in modern Europe.

In different fashions, using diverse procedures, and with a highly variable efficiency in each case, "the subject is objectified by a process of division either within himself or from others."⁹ In this process of social objectification and categorization, human beings are given both a social and a personal identity. Essentially "dividing practices" are modes of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science (or pseudo-science) and the practice of exclusion—usually in a spatial sense, but always in a social one. These dividing practices form a substantial part of the subject matter of Foucault's earlier books, *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, as well as later ones like *Discipline and Punish*. The main topics here are: the objectification of individuals drawn first from a rather undifferentiated mass (e.g., the vagabond populations in Paris in the seventeenth century), and later from more highly preselected populations (delinquents from working-class quarters); the interconnections of dividing practices with the formation and increasingly sophisticated elaboration of the social sciences; the historical relationship of these modes of classification, control, and containment to a distinctive tradition of humanitarian rhetoric on reform and progress; the increasingly efficient and diverse applications of these combined procedures of power and knowledge mainly, although not exclusively, to dominated groups or to groups formed and given an identity through the dividing practices.

The second mode for turning human beings into objectified subjects is related to, but independent from, the first. Let us call it "scientific classification." It arises from "the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences; for example, the objectivizing of the speaking subject in *grammaire*

générale, philology, and linguistics . . . [or] the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labors, in the analysis of wealth and of economics. Or . . . the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history or biology."¹⁰ This list constitutes a concise summary of the contents of Foucault's most controversial but also most well-received book, *The Order of Things*. In this dense and erudite study, Foucault shows how the discourses of life, labor, and language were structured into disciplines; how in this manner they achieved a high degree of internal autonomy and coherence; and how these disciplines of life, labor, and language—which we tend to view as dealing with universals of human social life and as therefore progressing logically and refining themselves in the course of history (as in the natural sciences)—changed abruptly at several junctures, displaying a conceptual discontinuity from the disciplines that had immediately preceded them.

The historical breaks that set off the classical age (roughly from the middle of the seventeenth century to the French Revolution) are characteristic hallmarks in all of Foucault's writings. Given French history, there is nothing particularly surprising about this chronology. Indeed, Foucault has often mistakenly been seen as a philosopher of discontinuity. The fault is partially his own; works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* certainly do emphasize abrupt changes in the structures of discourse of the human sciences. But Foucault has also stressed, in other contexts, the longer-range continuities in cultural practices. The sharp lines of discursive discontinuity in the human sciences and the longer lines of continuity in non-discursive practices provide Foucault with a powerful and flexible grid of interpretation with which to approach relations of knowledge and power. It should be underlined, however, that this is not a philosophy of history which for some mysterious reason glorifies discontinuity.

In both *The Order of Things* and in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault's only attempt at a systematic theoretical analysis abstracted from the historical dissection that constitutes the subject matter of his other books), discourse is bracketed off from the social practices and institutions in which it is embedded. This bracketing has also caused some confusion. Although

Foucault was temporarily caught up in some of the structuralist vocabulary of the moment, he never intended to isolate discourse from the social practices that surround it. Rather, he was experimenting to see how much autonomy could legitimately be claimed for discursive formations. His aim, then as now, was to avoid analyses of discourse (or ideology) as reflections, no matter how sophisticatedly mediated, of something supposedly "deeper" and more "real." In this sense, Foucault has been consistently materialist. In asking, "How does discourse function?" his aim has been to isolate techniques of power exactly in those places where this kind of analysis is rarely done. But to achieve this, he at first overemphasized the inner articulations and seemingly self-enclosed nature of social scientific discourses. Although Foucault has preserved the majority of his "archaeological" systematizations of the formation of concepts, objects, subjects, and strategies of discourse in the human sciences, he has now explicitly widened his analysis to show how these disciplines have played an effective part in a historical field that includes other types of nondiscursive practice.

Foucault has been consistently interested in the shifting ways that the body and the social institutions related to it have entered into political relations. In the first mode of objectification (the dividing practices), the constituted subject can be seen as a victim caught in the processes of objectification and constraint—most obviously the case for prisoners and mental patients. Although there are parallel developments associated with the second mode of objectification (scientific classification), the relation to domination is more oblique. For example, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault demonstrates how the body was increasingly treated as a thing during the nineteenth century, and how this objectification was paralleled and complemented by the dividing practices instituted in the clinic's spatial, temporal, and social compartmentalizations. But the two dimensions—dividing practices and scientific classification—are not the same thing; nor are they orchestrated together by some unseen actor. Foucault offers no casual explanations for these changes, leaving his readers somewhat at sea with regard to how he evaluates the interplay of intentional action, socioeconomic changes, particular interests, and accidents. Foucault's third mode of objectification represents his most

original contribution. Let us call it "subjectification." It concerns the "way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject."¹¹ This process differs in significant ways from the other two modes and represents an important new direction in Foucault's work. The dividing practices, broadly speaking, are techniques of domination and have been applied mainly to vagabond populations, the working classes, those defined as marginal, etc. The interplay between these modes of domination and various social scientific forms of classification, although given new clarity and power by Foucault's analysis and historical studies, has been recognized by other thinkers. In both instances, the person who is put into a cell or whose dossier is being compiled is basically in a passive, constrained position. In contrast, with the third mode—"subjectification"—Foucault looks at those processes of self-formation in which the person is active. His published analyses have focused on the dominant classes, in particular the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie: work in progress examines Greek citizens and the early Christian ascetics and Church Fathers. In these analyses, Foucault is primarily concerned with isolating those techniques through which the person initiates an active self-formation. This self-formation has a long and complicated genealogy: it takes place through a variety of "operations on [people's] own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct."¹² These operations characteristically entail a process of self-understanding but one which is mediated by an external authority figure, be he confessor or psychoanalyst. Foucault shows us, for example, how during the nineteenth century there was a vast proliferation of scientific discourses about "sex," in part because sex was seen as holding the key to self-understanding; this line culminated in Freud. Foucault also points to a growing obsession with sexuality, the health of the individual and the race, the growth of medical discourses about sexuality, and so forth. The individual and the race were thereby joined in a common set of concerns. It is important here not to draw too sharp a line between these processes of subjectification and, say, dividing practices. As Foucault shows in *The History of Sexuality* and in *Discipline and Punish*, the two can be effectively combined, although they are analytically distinguishable.

The Problem of Power/Knowledge

Taken together, the three modes of objectification of the subject (those that categorize, distribute, and manipulate); those through which we have come to understand ourselves scientifically; those that we have used to form ourselves into meaning-giving selves) designate the problematic of Foucault's inquiries. Yet it soon becomes apparent that if the most general theme of Foucault's work has been the problem of the subject, an understanding of this investigation requires the arsenal of subsidiary concepts and concerns he has forged along the way. Clustered tightly around the problem of the subject are the twin terms of power and knowledge. Their importance has already been well situated by Colin Gordon in his anthology of Foucault's essays, *Power/Knowledge*. Although there is no need to rehearse the arguments in any detail here, several points deserve to be underlined.

During most of the 1960s, Foucault sought, in a variety of ways, to isolate and analyze the structures of the human sciences treated as discursive systems. It is important to stress that Foucault did not see himself as a *practitioner* of these human sciences. They were his object of study. Foucault never took these discourses from the inside. That is, he never posed the question of the truth or falsity of the specific claims made in any particular discipline. Although he traced with great patience the discursive systems of the sciences of life, language, and labor, his aim was not to unveil the truths they had discovered or the falsities they had propounded. Rather, once again, it was the effective operation of these disciplines—how and around what concepts they formed, how they were used, where they developed—that was Foucault's prey. The problem became how to analyze the statements of the social sciences without judging their "progress" or lack of it, and without reducing their relative discursive and conceptual autonomy to something else seen to be more basic. As Colin Gordon puts it: "How are the human sciences historically possible, and what are the historical conditions of their existence?"¹³ Parallel, although not identical, questions have obviously been raised before, most notably in Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, but Foucault has pursued the consequences of these questions with unparalleled systematicity and vigor.

Foucault is resolutely and consistently anti-Hegelian and anti-Marxist in this area. The search for a general theory of history is not on his agenda. In fact, it is, in Foucault's diagnosis, part of the problem. Foucault seems to be identifying with the critique of theory initiated in modern times by Nietzsche and pursued by Heidegger. Yet Foucault's situating himself within this lineage does not entail the rejection of reason. He is adamant that he is not—as Jürgen Habermas, among others, has charged—an "irrationalist."¹⁴ Nor has he abandoned sustained critical argument in the public arena. He simply refuses to see reason as either our hope or our nemesis. Foucault puts it this way: "The relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident. And we should not need to wait for bureaucracy or concentration camps to recognize the existence of such relations. But the problem is: What to do with such an evident fact? Shall we try reason? To my mind, nothing would be more sterile. First, because the field has nothing to do with guilt or innocence. Second, because it is senseless to refer to reason as the contrary entry to nonreason. Lastly, because such a trial would trap us into playing the arbitrary and boring part of either the irrationalist or the rationalist."¹⁵

This anti-metaphysical and anti-ontological strain in Foucault's work is a powerful one. But questions—both philosophical and political—remain about the exact status of reason in Foucault's work. He seems to set himself close to, but apart from, a line of thinkers stretching from Max Weber to Martin Heidegger through Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Each of these men, in different ways, recognized both a centrality and a danger in the processes of increasing rationalization and technological development of the world. Each also differentiated between types of reason or thinking—instrumental, substantive, formal, critical, etc.—and attempted to separate out those dimensions and consequences of rational activity which were pernicious and those which in some form or other could serve as instruments of resisting or overcoming the destructive functioning of reason in Western culture.

Foucault's work is itself a testament to sustained critical rationality with political intent. However, we have only the beginnings of a critical assessment of the positive functions of

reason for Foucault. His is a constant pluralizing and decapitalizing of all the great concepts, first principles, and fundamental grounds that our tradition has produced. The problem of reason is not a juridical or ontological one; it is historical and political. As Foucault explains: "The central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century has always been . . . *What is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? . . .* [If] philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time to its intrinsic dangers."¹⁶

The Problem of Government

Just as Foucault innovatively sought to isolate and analyze a schema for understanding how our culture has produced different types of subjects, so too, his more recent work has thematized power in a new way. In his words: "Since the sixteenth century, a new political form of power has been continuously developing. This new political structure, as everyone knows, is the state. But most of the time, the state is envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interests of the totality, or, I should say, of a class or a group among the citizens. That's quite true. But I'd like to underline the fact that the state's power (and that's one of the reasons for its strength) is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power. Never, I think, in the history of human societies—even in the old Chinese society—has there been such a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques, and of totalization procedures."¹⁷

We have already looked at these "individualization techniques" in relation to the objectification of the subject. Now let us turn briefly to the "totalization procedures"—first, with a brief outline of Foucault's analysis of key historical changes in the state's relation to the individual.

With the Renaissance, new links between the state (formed by the great territorial monarchies that arose in Europe from the fragments of feudal estates) and the individual (whose soul and

salvation were given renewed prominence as a political issue in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation) gave rise to a new type of political reflection. From the middle of the sixteenth century, a series of treatises on the "art of government" began to appear. They were not concerned with the traditional questions of the nature of the state, nor even with problems of how the prince could best guard his power (although these topics were not entirely absent). Their scope was much wider. In fact, they covered almost everything. These treatises spoke directly of the "governing of a household, souls, children, a province, a convent, a religious order, or a family." Political reflection was thereby tacitly broadened to include almost all forms of human activity, from the smallest stirrings of the soul to the largest military maneuvers of the army. Each activity in its own specific way demanded reflection on how it could best be accomplished. "Best," Foucault tells us, meant "most economical." "The art of government . . . is concerned with . . . how to introduce economy, that is the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family, . . . how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family, into the management of the state."¹⁸

The first major shift, therefore, is from a concern with the nature of the state and then the prince and his concerns per se, to a broader and more detailed consideration of how to introduce economy and order (i.e., government) from the top of the state down through all aspects of social life. Society was becoming a political target.

Once one grasps Foucault's conceptualization of this shift, many seemingly mundane statements by minor administrators take on a new significance. For example, Foucault quotes a philosopher, Guillaume de la Perriere, in his treatise *Miroir de la politique* (1567): "government is the right disposition of things arranged so as to lead to a convenient end." The phrasing seems innocuous. Foucault, however, reads it as indicating a major shift in political thinking. He points out that for traditional theories of sovereignty there was a fundamental link between the sovereign and a territory. Granted, the sovereign also ruled all those who lived in that territory and controlled its resources. But the fundamental tie, the source of the sovereign's legitimacy,

was his connection to a realm. In Guillaume de la Perriere's definition, there is no mention of territory. Rather, a complex relationship of men and things is given priority. "Consequently," Foucault concludes, "the things which the government is to be concerned about are men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those other things which are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, etc.; men in their relation to other kinds of things which are customs, habits, ways of doing and thinking, etc.; lastly, men in their relation to that other kind of things which are accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, etc."¹⁹ The concerns of a well-governed polity (or, as it would be called in the eighteenth century, a well-policed state) now extend from the prince and his conduct down through the customs of the people to the environment itself.

These treatises on government were more than merely academic exercises. In France, from the middle of the sixteenth century on, they are linked directly to the rise and growth of centralized state administrative apparatuses. In fact, it was only slightly later, in the seventeenth century, that detailed knowledge of the disposability of the things available—the different "elements, dimensions and factors of the state's power"—was christened "statistics": the science of the state. The art of government and empirical knowledge of the state's resources and condition—its statistics—together formed the major components of a new political rationality. A rationality, Foucault assures us, from which we have not yet emerged.

The attention to population, family, and economy during the classical age is related to well-studied historical events which the *Annales* school has made famous: "the demographic expansion of the eighteenth century, connected with historical monetary abundance, which in turn was linked to the expansion of agricultural production through a series of circular processes."²⁰ Foucault's contribution has been to extend the links between these long-term changes and certain political processes which have been systematically underplayed by the *Annales* historians. Specifically, he has helped to explain economic, demographic, and political patterns of the classical age in a manner which

reveals conscious decisions being made by administrators regarding the supposedly unconscious forces analyzed by the "long durée" historians.

As the fostering of life and the growth and care of population becomes a central concern of the state, articulated in the art of government, a new regime of power takes hold. Foucault calls this regime "bio-power." He explains that bio-power "brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of the transformation of human life. . . . Modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question."²¹ Bio-power coalesces around two distinct poles at the beginning of the classical age. One pole is the human species. For the first time in history, scientific categories (species, population, fertility, and so forth), rather than juridical ones, become the object of systematic, sustained political attention and intervention.

The other pole of bio-power is the human body: the body approached not directly in its biological dimension, but as an object to be manipulated and controlled. A new set of operations, of procedures—those joinings of knowledge and power that Foucault calls "technologies"—come together around the objectification of the body. They form the "disciplinary technology" that Foucault analyzes in detail in *Discipline and Punish*.

The aim of disciplinary technology, whatever its institutional form—and it arose in a large number of different settings, such as workshops, schools, prisons, and hospitals—is to forge a "docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved."²² This is done in several related ways: through drills and training of the body, through standardization of actions over time, and through the control of space. Discipline proceeds from an organization of individuals in space, and it requires a specific enclosure of space. Once established, this grid permits the sure distribution of the individuals who are to be disciplined and supervised. In a factory, the procedure facilitates productivity; in a school, it assures orderly behavior; in a town, it reduces the risk of dangerous crowds, wandering vagabonds, or epidemic diseases.

Disciplinary control—and the readings included in this collection specify its complexity and variety in detail—is unques-

tionably linked to the rise of capitalism. But the relationship between the economic changes that resulted in the accumulation of capital and the political changes that resulted in the accumulation of power remains to be specified. Foucault argues that the two are mutually dependent: "Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other." For instance, "the massive projection of military models onto industrial organization was an example of [the] modeling of the division of labor following the model laid down by the schemata of power."²² Disciplinary technologies, in other words, preceded modern capitalism. In Foucault's argument, they are among its preconditions. Without the availability of techniques for subjecting individuals to discipline, including the spatial arrangements necessary and appropriate to the task, the new demands of capitalism would have been stymied. In a parallel manner, without the fixation, control, and rational distribution of populations built on a statistical knowledge of them, capitalism would have been impossible. The growth and spread of disciplinary mechanisms of knowledge and power preceded the growth of capitalism in both the logical and temporal sense. Although these technologies did not cause the rise of capitalism, they were the prerequisites for its success.

The growth of capitalism, however, is not Foucault's focus. His concern is the subject and power, as well as the political rationality which has bound them together. We can draw these themes together with an example, perhaps the most famous one from Foucault's repertoire. Foucault selects Jeremy Bentham's plan for the panopticon as the paradigm of a disciplinary technology. And his analysis of this apparatus serves as a shorthand for the other technologies that he analyzes.

The panopticon offers a particularly vivid instance of how political technologies of the body function. It is "a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. . . . [I]t is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form. . . . it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use."²⁴ It is also a particular organization of space and human beings, a visual order that clarifies the mechanisms of power which are being deployed.

The panopticon consists of a large courtyard, with a tower in the center, surrounded by a series of buildings divided into levels and cells. In each cell there are two windows: one brings in light and the other faces the tower, where large observatory windows allow for the surveillance of the cells. The cells become "small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible."²⁵ The inmate is not simply visible to the supervisor; he is visible to the supervisor alone—cut off from any contact. This new power is continuous and anonymous. Anyone could operate the architectural mechanisms as long as he was in the correct position, and anyone could be subjected to it. The surveillant could as easily be observing a criminal, a schoolboy, or a wife (Bentham suggests, apparently without humor, that the panopticon would be an extremely effective arrangement for a harem, since it would cut down the number of eunuchs necessary to watch the women in the cells).

The architectural perfection is such that even if there is no guardian present, the power apparatus still operates effectively. The inmate cannot see whether or not the guardian is in the tower, so he must behave as if surveillance were perpetual and total. If the prisoner is never sure when he is being observed, he becomes his own guardian. As the final step in architectural and technological perfection, the panopticon includes a system for observing and controlling the controllers. Those who occupy the central position in the panopticon are themselves thoroughly enmeshed in a localization and ordering of their own behavior. "Such is perhaps the most diabolical aspect of the idea and of all the applications it brought about," Foucault comments. "In this form of management, power is not totally entrusted to someone who would exercise it alone, over others, in an absolute fashion; rather, this machine is one in which everyone is caught, those who exercise this power as well as those who are subjected to it."²⁶

Thus, through spatial ordering, the panopticon brings together power, control of the body, control of groups and knowledge (the inmate is observed and examined systematically in his cell). It locates individuals in space, in a hierarchical and efficiently visible organization. Although Bentham's scheme was never fully implemented, nor (as we shall see) did the numerous

adaptations ever operate as effectively as Bentham intended them to, it is nonetheless a crucial development for Foucault. As he explains: "The automatic functioning of power, mechanical operation, is absolutely not the thesis of *Discipline and Punish*. Rather, it is the idea, in the eighteenth century, that such a form of power is possible and desirable. It is the theoretical and practical search for such mechanisms, the will, constantly attested, to organize this kind of mechanism which constitutes the object of my analysis."²⁷

A particular rationality accompanies the panoptic technology: one that is self-contained and nontheoretical, geared to efficiency and productivity. For Bentham, the panopticon had the advantage of being utilitarian, capable of service in a multitude of settings for a multitude of purposes. It seemed to pose no standard of judgment or to follow any particular program. It aimed to be a tool for distributing individuals in space, for ordering them in a visible way. Hence its potential for generalization.

Foucault, however, points to an additional rationality built into the project of the panopticon. It offered a logic not only of efficiency but also of normalization. By "normalization," Foucault means a system of finely gradated and measurable intervals in which individuals can be distributed around a norm—a norm which both organizes and is the result of this controlled distribution. A system of normalization is opposed to a system of law or a system of personal power. There are no fixed pivot points from which to make judgments, to impose will. Normative, serialized (to use the Sartrean term) order is an essential component of the regime of bio-power, for "a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. . . . Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor. . . . it effects distributions around the norm. . . . [The] juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory."²⁸

This normative rationality has gradually undermined and "invested" (like a parasite invests a body) both the excesses of sovereign power and, more important, the procedures of the

law (without eliminating either, again like a parasite). The entry of medicine, psychiatry, and some social sciences into legal deliberations in the nineteenth century led in the direction of what Foucault calls a systematic "normalization" of the law—that is, toward an increasing appeal to statistical measures and judgments about what is normal and what is not in a given population, rather than adherence to absolute measures of right and wrong. Under the regime of bio-power, neither the sovereign nor the law—*ni roi, ni loi*—escapes the spread of normative rationality. "There are two meanings of the word *subject*," Foucault writes, "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to."²⁹

An essential component of technologies of normalization is the key role they play in the systematic creation, classification, and control of "anomalies" in the social body. Their *raison d'être* comes from two claims of their promoters: first, that certain technologies serve to isolate anomalies; and second, that one can then normalize anomalies through corrective or therapeutic procedures, determined by other related technologies. In both cases, the technologies of normalization are purportedly impartial techniques for dealing with dangerous social deviations. However, as Foucault shows in great detail in *Discipline and Punish* and in *The History of Sexuality*, the advance of bio-power in the nineteenth century is in fact contemporary with the appearance and proliferation of the modern categories of anomaly—the delinquent, the pervers—*which the technologies of discipline and confession are supposedly designed to eliminate, but never do.* In Foucault's reading: "The implantation of perversions in an instrument effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct."³⁰ The end of good government is the correct disposition of things—even when these things have to be invented so as to be well governed.

With the nineteenth century, the possibility of knowledge about and control over the most minute aspects of behavior in

the name of the population's welfare is at least present in principle, although never fully realized. A vast documentary apparatus becomes an essential part of normalizing technologies. Precise dossiers enable the authorities to fix individuals in a web of objective codification. More precise and more statistically accurate knowledge of individuals leads to finer and more encompassing criteria for normalization. This accumulation of documentation makes possible "the measurement of overall phenomena, the description of groups, the characterization of collective facts, the calculation of the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given 'population.'" 21 The power of the state to produce an increasingly totalizing web of control is intertwined with and dependent on its ability to produce an increasing specification of individuality.

Foucault does not claim that this totalizing and individualizing power has empirically taken hold of everything, nor that it is ineluctable. And yet this increasing subjection is not a mere dream. One can fairly ask of Foucault: What is to be done in the face of this spreading web of power? Yet he has been in general highly reticent about the role of advocate. All the same he does, from time to time, offer general evaluations. Here is one: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of [a] political 'double bind,' which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures. The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state's institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries." 22

The general practical implications of this challenge have not been explored by Foucault in his writings, at least not to any great extent. If one were to analyze Foucault's political activities over the last twenty years, one would gain an indication of the scope of fights against totalization and objectification of the subject. But in these struggles he has been a citizen like any other,

claiming no special rights for himself, nor any direct and privileged relationship between his intellectual work and his actions.

The Location of the Author

Indeed, one encounters great difficulty in trying to situate Foucault as an intellectual spokesman with a particular message to propound. He is not an intellectual prophet. Unlike Jean-Paul Sartre, he does not take it upon himself to speak in the voice of Reason, Justice, Progress, Objectively Better Positions, or even Futility. On several occasions (e.g., in "Truth and Power"), Foucault has pronounced, in the most reluctant of prophetic voices, the end of intellectual prophecy. But that is the extent of his Delphic statements. In his opinion, the universal intellectual, whose task was to speak the truth to power in the name of universal reason, justice, and humanity, is no longer a viable cultural figure; the reign of that individual is over. Sartre was the last incumbent. (Of course, there is a certain contradiction in Foucault's assuredness in offering such predictions. On the basis of what privileged position, what sources of certain knowledge, can he be sure that the figure of the universal intellectual has passed from the historical scene?)

But Foucault is not a biologist or a physicist, a man of science, either. Such scientists occupy the key positions of the "specific intellectual" (Foucault's term for those sectorial specialists on whom our future depends and who must speak to us from their laboratories). Their voices are given an authority because their work and our fate are intertwined, not because they have any special claim to represent reason. The specific intellectual is "he who, along with a handful of others, has at his disposal, whether in the service of the state or against it, powers which can either benefit or irrevocably destroy life. He is no longer the rhapsodist of the eternal, but the strategist of life and death." 23 As a professor who holds the Chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France, Foucault is clearly not without a certain prestige, yet he is obviously not a "strategist of life and death"—even if he has become their historian.

Nor has Foucault been willing to play the Parisian game of

the "writer" as it has been defined in recent years. The "writer" has now replaced the universal intellectual. Although such figures no longer wield the power and influence of Emile Zola, Victor Hugo, or even André Gide, they are nonetheless persons of influence and visibility in contemporary France. In fact, the new socialist regime, highly self-conscious about its relations with intellectuals and its place in history, has chosen to give prominence to two types of intellectuals: writers and technocrats. Among his first acts, in the name of French universalism, President François Mitterrand granted French citizenship to two writers exiled from totalitarian regimes; his highly influential and ambitious minister of research has chosen to lionize French technocrats, declaring that nuclear power and bio-engineering are the key sectors for socialism to develop.

How, then, to situate Foucault? From whence does his authority flow—if not from Reason and Justice, if not from Science, if not from courtly Art? In his essay "What Is an Author?" Foucault provides us with some elements of an answer. He makes a distinction, for instance, between the changing historical importance of the author in literature and science. He points out that in the West, until the seventeenth century, the scientific text was the one more closely associated with and legitimated by the celebrity and authority of the author: "Those texts that we now would call scientific—those dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine and illnesses, natural sciences and geography—were accepted in the Middle Ages, and accepted as 'true' only when marked with the name of their author."²⁴ This situation has obviously changed today. Once these disciplines crossed the scientific threshold of "formalization" and succeeded in developing procedures of concept formation, evidence, verification, etc., then the name of the author was no longer central to the authority of the text. Truth became more anonymous.

In literature, schematizing broadly, we find the opposite trajectory. During the Middle Ages, "the texts that we today call 'literary' (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author; their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status."²⁵ Since

the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, literature with a capital L has emerged as an autonomous and highly valued activity, with a place for itself on the intellectual scene (see Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*). And the authority of the author has continued to grow in literary productions. The identification and evaluation of a literary work are intimately linked to the fame, standing, and reputation of its author, and from the intellectual world that gravitates toward those in power.

Foucault then briefly alludes to a third type of authorial location. These are the rare figures, social thinkers it seems, whom he calls "founders of discursivity." Specifically, he mentions Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. What Foucault describes are figures who provide a paradigmatic set of terms, images, and concepts which organize thinking and experience about the past, present, and future of society, doing so in a way which enigmatically surpasses the specific claims they put forth. This status is particular to the human sciences. Whereas in the biological or physical sciences the original texts, say James Clerk Maxwell's equations or those of Albert Einstein, are fully absorbed and surpassed by the scientific work that follows them, this is not the case in the human sciences.

Foucault is not implying that progress is unilinear in the harder sciences, only that one type of discursive system is characteristic of these disciplines, and another is characteristic of the contemporary human sciences. In the latter case, one finds a constant return to the texts of certain "founders of discursivity," despite advances in factual content, verification of hypotheses, and method. Showing the inconsistencies in Freud or the failure of Marx's predictions has not destroyed either Freudian psychoanalysis or Marxism. Foucault observes: "To expand a type of discursivity, such as psychoanalysis as founded by Freud, is not to give it a formal generality that it would not have permitted at the outset, but rather to open it to a certain number of applications. . . . In addition, one does not declare certain propositions in the work of these founders to be false: instead. . . . one sets aside those statements that are not pertinent. . . . reexamining Freud's texts modifies psychoanalysis itself, just as a reexamination of Marx's would modify Marxism."²⁶ Foucault is not endorsing, celebrating, or lamenting this curious discursive

sive formation in the human sciences; he is indicating its existence, and in that he is, again, highly original.

My wager is that Michel Foucault himself may well be one of these "founders of discursivity." The judgment having been made, it must be immediately modified. If Foucault's work does indeed function in the future as a central organizer of social discourses, it will do so in a way radically different discursively, institutionally, politically, and—dare I say—psychologically from the work of Marx and Freud.

Nor do I see Foucault as the sole figure with such a status. Two figures with whom interesting comparisons might be made are Thomas Kuhn and Max Weber (neither of whom has had any direct influence on Foucault).

Taking Kuhn first, there are of course striking parallels in the content of Foucault's and Kuhn's work, in their emphasis on how scientific reflection and research are organized, operate, and change.³⁷ Moreover, both have been received enthusiastically, yet both have shunned the empire-building that has been opened to them. At the same time a flurry of negative reviews and hostile, petty corrections has accompanied the growing influence of and the new inquiries stemming from both men's work. This reaction seems to indicate an important shift in our contemporary discursive style, and perhaps the emergence of a radically different manner of inquiry for research. The questions both men ask extend from the human sciences across to the supposedly solid, unbiased, hard sciences. What is most infuriating to fact-oriented, feet-on-the-ground empiricists is that Foucault's and Kuhn's thinking has evolved from a systematic ability to comprehend exactly those phenomena of "shared practices," "disciplinary matrices," "petty malices" which partially constitute scientific activity, although they don't exhaust it.

Still, whatever the impact of Kuhn's work in the long run, its scope and subject matter are more limited than and inherently different from those of Foucault. And so the comparison with Max Weber suggests itself. For Foucault and Weber share a clarity about our historical nightmare—in Weber's terms, the "mighty cosmos of the modern economic order . . . the iron cage [in which] specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart,

[are] caught in the delusion that [they] have achieved a level of development never before attained by mankind."³⁸ That Weber came from the liberal nationalist tradition of the German academy and Foucault from the radical splinters of the French intelligentsia is of course historically significant, but it is not an impediment to the comparison, for neither man can be captured by or reduced to these characterizations. Weber, although often cast as a conservative, offers a devastating account of modern capitalism which certainly does not suggest that he wished to preserve it whole. Foucault has been cast as a conservative by some, in the sense that he has consistently opposed much of modern French Marxism, "existing socialism," and those utopias and nightmares associated with this tradition. But such labels tell us little. What both Weber and Foucault proffer—in a pessimistic and dour mode in Weber's case, and an elusive and joyous one in Foucault's—is a heroic refusal to sentimentalize the past in any way or to shirk the necessity of facing the future as dangerous but open. Both have committed their lives to a scrupulous, if unorthodox, forging of intellectual tools for the analysis of modern rationality, social and economic organization, and subjectivity. Both see a form of critical historicism as the only road to preserving reason and the obligation—differently understood by Weber and Foucault—to forge an ascetic ethic of scientific and political responsibility as the highest duty of the mature intellectual.

—Paul Rabinow

[Editor's note: The choice of texts is always an arbitrary one. Given the wealth of Foucault's past writings and the new directions his work is currently taking, the task is doubly hard. I have chosen to emphasize the political and social dimensions of his work in which practices and discourses intertwine. The main sacrifice this choice has occasioned is the absence of texts from Foucault's rich and important "archaeological period" during the 1960s—*The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. It seemed better to concentrate on those texts in which power, discourse, and the subject were related to non-discursive practices in a sustained manner than to try to include everything. The resultant distortion is duly noted and responsibility accepted.]