

# The Anti-philosophy of Michel Foucault. A Philosophical Account

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**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. Archaeology as positive description. 3. The struggle against the social and the historical sciences. 4. The struggle against legal and political philosophy. 5. The pragmatic components of Foucault's critique. 6. The normative components of Foucault's critique. 7. The production of the subject and bio-power. 8. Conclusion.

**Abstract:** The core of Michel Foucault's micro-physics of power is anti-philosophy, that is, the will to let historicity prevail over intellectual abstraction. The purpose of this article, at a moment in which philosophy accepts being confined to the proclamation of its own undesirability or of its closure, is to show that Foucault's critical project has been pursued by philosophical means for philosophical purposes, maintaining a dialogue with the theories of power that he ceaselessly sought to deconstruct.

**Keywords:** Anti-philosophy, Archaeological method, Genealogy, Deconstruction, Critique of the Social Sciences and the Humanities, Politics of Difference.

## 1. Introduction

During the 1960s 'New Left' emancipatory movements took the cause of the oppressed minorities as one of their major concerns. It was repeatedly suggested that public acknowledgment of differences is the best way for redressing injustices experienced by group of citizens on account of their collective identity differences. This was the position at the heart of the so-called politics of difference. The so-called philosophy of difference constituted the other side of the same medal. In this context Michel Foucault appeared as one of the most brilliant theorists of difference, dispersion, and singularities<sup>1</sup>. Foucault himself introduced himself as a promotor of 'diagnostic knowledge', a form of knowledge concerned with defining and determining differences<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J. RAJCHMAN, *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy*, Columbia University Press, New York 1985, p. 2; S. LAZARUS, *L'Anthropologie du nom*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1996, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *An Historian of Culture in Foucault Live. Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, ed. S. Lotringer, Semiotexte, New York 1996, pp. 95-104.

Foucault's thought has a multifaceted character that still appeals to a vast array of readers who could search in it what they needed to think and act with. The 'afterlives' of his critical project are thus experienced in a variety of directions and domains of research including gender studies, gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. According to some of his interpreters Foucault is the twentieth-century thinker who, more radically than others perhaps, shaped the ways in which we think today in matters of knowledge and society. He helped finding unprecedented ways of constructing new forms of thinking as well as of demolishing old certainties and comfortable illusions. He championed the will to restlessly question the ingrained social order whilst holding on to a fragile commitment to freedom.<sup>3</sup> Others argued that Foucault's work does not so much teach us new ways of knowing, but it rather invites us to share in a radical calling into question of the ways in which knowledge itself operates<sup>4</sup>. It has also been argued that initially Foucault sought to decode the culturally determining forms of knowledge of European modernity as discursive practices without neither a centre nor a subject. Subsequently, he sought to discover the deeply rooted social and diffuse nature of power as a complex network of strategic actions<sup>5</sup>. The best for us, I guess, is to see what Foucault said of himself. Towards the end of his life, he drew attention to the three most important shifts in his thought. The first shift was determined by the need to analyse the discursive practices through which the human sciences developed. The second shift was inspired by the need to examine the manifold relations, strategies, and techniques through which power is exercised. The third shift was determined by the need to focus on the forms and modalities of the relation to the self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself as a 'desiring' subject<sup>6</sup>.

The thesis that all forms of knowledge, and the discourses which the latter have given rise to, are historically determined, and contingent upon the workings of power, is the thread which connects the different phases of Foucault's thought. There is no power relation without the correlative discursive constitution of a field of knowledge, which Foucault himself called *episteme*, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time a certain discursive configuration of power relations. The power-knowledge relations, warned Foucault, are to be analysed not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not «free in relation to the power system». On the contrary, «the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations». For Foucault it is not the activity of the subject that produces knowledge, useful or

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<sup>3</sup> J. OKSALA, *How to Read Foucault*, Granta Books, London 2007, pp. 7-15.

<sup>4</sup> L. DOWNING, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008, vii-x.

<sup>5</sup> A. HONNETH, *Kritik der Macht. Reflexionsstufen einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1985; *The Critique of Power. Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. K. Baynes, The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London 1991, pp. 105-202.

<sup>6</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *L'usage des plaisirs*, Gallimard, Paris 1984; *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality: 2*, trans. R. Hurley, Penguin Books, London-New York 1992, p. 6.

resistant to power, but power-knowledge, «the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, the processes and struggles that determine the forms and possible domains of knowledge»<sup>7</sup>.

The urge to provide a concrete analysis of power relations – not of power - is the driving force behind Foucault's work. Through a historically pregnant analysis of the ways in which power relations are constructed, conceptualized, justified in ethical and codified in social terms, the French philosopher sought to bring all philosophizing about power in its various forms to an end for philosophizing about power, he claimed, produces misleading and totalitarian abstractions. All philosophies of power, despite their peculiarities, are wrong in that they treat power as a universal substance. The only truth of power is that concrete power relations, not power as such, is all that is the case. So, instead of looking for the single form from which all forms of power derive, we must observe power relations in their multiplicity, specificity and reversibility on the assumption that these relations produce subjectivity, not vice versa.

In this context, notions such as *episteme* and *discourse* are of paramount importance. In the inaugural lecture at the Collège de France (2 December 1970), entitled *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault argued that discourse constitute a complex and relatively independent level of reality. Discourses are series of events. In every society the production of discourse is simultaneously «controlled, selected, organised and redistributed» by procedures whose role is «to ward off its powers and dangers» as well as «to evade its materiality». Discourse, far from being the transparent, or neutral, element in which power is «disarmed or pacified», is a place where power itself exercises some of its most striking effects. Discourse is not simply the element which either manifests or hides desire. It is, instead, the very object of desire. Eventually, discourse is not simply the element which «sublimates the struggle for power», but is «the thing for which, and by which, there is a struggle for power». Discourse, Foucault concluded, is not merely a linguistic «surface of inscription», but something eminently destined to bring about existentially significant effects. Discourse is «the power which is to be seized» par excellence.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between theory and discourse, it must be noted incidentally, is both fascinating and ambiguous. In answering Gilles Deleuze's claim that a theory must be like a 'box of tools' designed to be useful, for instance, Foucault affirmed that a theory is not an instrument to express, translate, or apply practice, but rather a 'local', discursive, practice<sup>9</sup>.

The basic assumption of this essay is that Foucault's struggle against all philosophies of power has been conducted by philosophical means for philosophical purposes. Thus it can be arguably seen as the struggle of anti-philosophy, that is, a powerful intellectual effort to bring philosophical practice as

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<sup>7</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris 1975; *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan, Vintage Books, New York 1995, pp. 27-28.

<sup>8</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *L'ordre du discours*, Gallimard, Paris 1971; *The Order of Discourse* in R. YOUNG (ed.), *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston (Mass.)-London 1981, pp. 51-78, 52-53, 69.

<sup>9</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Intellectuals and Power* in *Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 74-82.

such into question. Not surprisingly, Foucault has been called ‘the prince of contemporary anti-philosophy’<sup>10</sup>. In one of his 1936 William James lectures at Harvard University, Étienne Gilson said that «philosophy always buries its undertakers», suggesting that a proclamation of the end of philosophy itself constitutes a recurring moment not only within the history of philosophy, but within philosophy itself<sup>11</sup>. Does Gilson’s warning apply to Foucault too? This essay constitutes a meta-critical analysis of Foucault’s deconstruction of power and its general purpose is generating a critical apprehension of the quintessentially philosophical character of Foucault’s anti-philosophy.

## 2. Archaeology as positive description

In various occasions, Foucault declared he was neither a historian, nor a philosopher in the current sense of the term. Certainly, he denied being a philosopher of *Weltgeschichte*. At the same time he confirmed he has always had a passion for historicity and historical investigation. All he had done, Foucault once said, is conducting a number of historical and political investigations<sup>12</sup>. Paul Veyne argued that Foucault practiced philosophy in the form of both «an empirical kind of anthropology» and «a kind of hermeneutic positivism» based on «historical critique»<sup>13</sup>. At first sight, Grahame Lock argued, one might take Foucault to be engaged in a kind of history of ideas, for instance on account of the title of the chair - history of systems of thought - he held at the prestigious Collège de France<sup>14</sup>. After all Foucault himself in various occasions declared to be a historian of thought rather than a philosopher. How are we to understand the expression ‘historian of thought’ with a view to the definition of the archaeological method?

In an interview conducted by Raymond Bellour, first published in *Les Lettres Françaises* (31 March 1966), Foucault declared to be interested in «the history not of thought in general but of all that “contains thought” in a culture, of all in which there is thought». Every society, he argued, rests partially upon a number of popular representations ordered in discursive form, that is, a multiplicity of bodies of

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<sup>10</sup> A. BADIOU, *Abrégé de métapolitique*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1998; *Metapolitics*, trans. J. Barker, Verso, London-New York 2005, p. 52. See also Id., *L’aventure de la philosophie française depuis les années 1960*, La Fabrique Editions, Paris 2012; *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. B. Bosteels, Verso, London-New York 2012, p. 87. The label *anti-philosophy* generally refers to the work of thinkers who have the same relationship to philosophy as the anti-art of, for instance, Marcel Duchamp has to art. This is both a «traumatic breach with every preconception of the past» and «a vital rejuvenation of a stale form». B. Groys, *Einführung in die Anti-Philosophie*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 2009; *Introduction to Antiphilosophy*, trans. D. Fernbach, Verso, London-New York 2012, xi.

<sup>11</sup> É. GILSON, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (1937), Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1999, p. 246.

<sup>12</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *El poder, una bestia magnífica*, interview with M. Osorio, in *Quadernos para el dialogo*, 238 (1977), now in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 3, pp. 368-382.

<sup>13</sup> P. VEYNE, *Foucault*, Éditions Albin Michel, Paris 2008; *Foucault. His Thought, His Character*, trans. J. Lloyd, Polity Press, Cambridge-Malden (Mass.) 2010, pp. 2, 16, 37.

<sup>14</sup> G.E. LOCK, *Michel Foucault (1926-1984)* in *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (1985), eds. A. Kuper and J. Kuper, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames-New York 2009.

knowledge circulating through ordinary opinions, customs and practices (*savoir*), and partially upon bodies of learning to be found in scientific books, philosophical theories, and religious justifications (*connaissance*). The exploration of the domain of *savoir*, seen as the condition of possibility for the domain of institutionalized knowledge, is now the task of archaeology, which Foucault sees as both a style and a domain of research allowing «to avoid every problem concerning the anteriority of theory in relation to practice and the reverse»<sup>15</sup>. The fact that Foucault was reluctant in using the term ‘theory’, and yet he called archaeology «a kind of theory for a history of empirical knowledge» is symptomatic<sup>16</sup>. Prior to Foucault, however, archaeology in the philosophical sense was the particular domain of knowledge that Kant, for instance, conceived as ‘science of ruins’<sup>17</sup>.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) Foucault refused to characterize his work in terms of history of ideas, and also made an appeal to set the latter aside. He recognizes that anyone who practices history and its method cannot conceive the abandonment of the history of ideas, a fascinating discipline indeed. On the one hand, the latter appears to be concerned with all that insidious and imperfect mass of thought which could never attain the form of science: «in the interstices of the great discursive monuments, it reveals the crumbling soil on which they are based». On the other hand, the history of ideas constitutes «an uncertain object, with badly drawn frontiers, methods borrowed from here and there, and an approach lacking in rigour and stability». Even if «it tries to revive the most elaborate forms of discourse in the concrete landscape, in the midst of the growth and development that witnessed their birth», it remains «the discipline of beginnings and ends, the description of obscure continuities and returns, the reconstitution of developments in the linear form of history»<sup>18</sup>. This most likely means that it ends up manifesting itself as a ‘totalizing project’ seeking to rewrite history in order to produce an artificially coherent or unified object of study<sup>19</sup>. Archaeological description is precisely the abandonment of the history of ideas on the presupposition that the former does not try to define the thoughts, representations, themes and preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourse, but those discourses themselves as practices obeying certain rules. Discourses are not like documents that ought to be intelligible, but whose opacity must be ‘pierced’ in order to reach «the depth of the essential in the place in which it is held in reserve». Archaeological analysis does not seek to reconstruct the continuous transition that relates discourses. Rather it tries to define discourses in their specificity so that it can «show in what way the set of rules that they put into operation is irreducible to any other». It does not aim at grasping «the moment in which the *œuvre* emerges on the anonymous horizon» also

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<sup>15</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Order of Things* in *Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 13-18.

<sup>16</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in *Foucault Live*, cit., p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> G. AGAMBEN, *Signatura rerum. Sul metodo*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008; *The Signature of All Things. On Method*, trans. L. D’Isanto with K. Attell, Zone Books, New York 2009, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *L’archéologie du savoir*, Gallimard, Paris 1969; *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames-New York 2011, pp. 153-154.

<sup>19</sup> G.E. LOCK, *Michel Foucault (1926-1984)*, cit.

because the sovereignty of the creative subject, seen as the *raison d'être* of a *œuvre* and the principle of its unity, is alien to it. Finally it does not try to restore «what has been thought, wished, aimed at, experienced, desired by men in the very moment at which they expressed it in discourse». Archaeological description «is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin». It is just «the systematic description of a discourse-object»<sup>20</sup>.

The notions of archaeology and archive are closely linked in Foucault's critical project. Foucault referred the notion of archive to the series of discourses actually pronounced, which could remain «in the limbo or purgatory of history», but also «continue to function, to be transformed through history, and to provide the possibility of appearing in other discourses». At the same time, he specified that archaeology does not denote the study of the beginning as the first origin or foundation, but «the relative beginnings», namely «the institutionalizations and transformations» rather than the foundations. He added that archaeology was not to be referred to traditional 'excavations', namely the search of relations that are «secret, hidden, more silent or deeper than the consciousness of man». On the contrary, archaeology is the method to define «the relations on the very surface of discourse». «I attempt to make visible», Foucault said, «what is invisible only because it's too much on the surface of things».<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, Foucault further elaborated on the notion of archive affirming that the latter is not that which «safeguards the event of the statement, and preserves, for future memories, its status as an escape». Rather, it is that which, «at the very root of the statement-event, and in that which embodies it, defines at the outset the system of its enunciability». So the notion of archive denotes a particular practice, one «that causes a multiplicity of statements to emerge so as many regular events, as so many things to be dealt with and manipulated». The archive eventually is «the general system of the formation and transformation of statements». Again he emphasized that the archaeological description has nothing to do with the search for a beginning, but «designates the general theme of a description that questions the already-said at the level of its existence». Archaeology, he concluded, «describes discourses as practices specified in the element of the archive».<sup>22</sup>

In the opening lecture of the series delivered at the Collège de France in the period January-March 1976, entitled *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault took up again the topic of the meaning of archaeology. His primary concern was to argue that from the mid-1960s onwards critical thinking was only possible thanks to the liberation of both the 'subjugated' bodies of knowledge, which, being naïve, non-erudite, non-scientific, hence unqualified, or disqualified, ordinary people are normally attached to, and the 'buried' scholarly knowledge, which scholars should care about. These bodies of knowledge

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<sup>20</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, cit., 155-156.

<sup>21</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge in Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 57-64.

<sup>22</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 146, 148.

respectively are local and differential. Thus archaeology focuses on them being the specific method of analysis of 'local discursivities'<sup>23</sup>.

### 3. The struggle against the social and the historical sciences

Prior to the announcement of the critical dismissal of the history of ideas, Foucault had launched a critical attack against the social sciences, and anthropology in particular. He did so, one might say, in typically philosophical fashion, if it is true, as Badiou noted, that philosophy is «the site of thought» at which non-philosophical truths «seize us and are seized as such»<sup>24</sup>. In *The Order of Things* (1966), on the basis of structuralist assumptions, Foucault attacked anthropology seen as half-empirical and half-philosophical universal reflection on man. Anthropology still had as its essence humanism as the referent of the transcendental notion of consciousness<sup>25</sup>.

At first sight one might think that the core of Foucault's critical project is not incompatible with the basic assumptions of Clifford Geertz's interpretative theory of culture, for instance. According to Geertz anthropological investigation must not be an experimental science in search of laws and regularities, but an interpretative knowledge in search of meaning. Culture, Geertz affirmed, is «a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life»<sup>26</sup>. Foucault himself said he sought to explore «the sub-soil of our consciousness of meaning»<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, he also said that archaeology «is not an interpretative discipline», in the sense that «it does not seek another, better-hidden discourse»<sup>28</sup>. The critical dissolution of anthropology, and of the social sciences in general, into their specialized successors is part of a broader deconstructive programme that included, as we shall see, both legal and political philosophy. By focusing on social practices without presupposing that any describable domain of thought and experience can unify them, Foucault intended to show that anthropology too - one of the nineteenth century 'grand narratives' or main 'conglomerates disciplines' where humanities, social, and natural sciences intersected and confronted each other - had no rights to vindicate its unity and integrity as scientific discourse. This deconstructive move seems to be compatible with Foucault's aim

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<sup>23</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1975-1976*, Éditions du Seuil-Gallimard, Paris 1997; *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, trans. D. Macey, Penguin Books, London-New York 2003, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> A. BADIOU, *Conditions*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1992; *Conditions*, trans. S. Corcoran, Continuum, London-New York 2008, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Le mots et le choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Gallimard, Paris 1966 ; *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage Books, New York 1994, xvi-xxiv.

<sup>26</sup> C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York 1973, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Order of Things in Foucault Live*, cit., p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, cit., p. 155.

of gaining new ways of understanding in a new anthropological style the interpretation that Europeans of different epochs, in different intellectual and material positions, from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, gave to their experience of madness, punishment, sexuality and power. This compatibility, I would argue, conceptually works on the basis of the practice of philosophy.

Foucault was reluctant in accepting the ‘double obligation’ regarding interpretation and formalization that, according to him, has dominated the human as well as the social sciences. The imperative of interpretation is, in his eyes at least, about the necessity to understand hidden meanings. The imperative of formalization is about the necessity of discovering, hence formalizing, invariants that are structural. Foucault pointed out that his reflection on archaeology allowed him to discover «the branch that bore this fork»<sup>29</sup>. As far as the first imperative is concerned, as I pointed out, Foucault’s hermeneutics aimed not at «looking underneath discourse for the thought of men», but at grasping discourse «in its manifest existence» as a practice that obeys rules of formation, existence, co-existence, and functioning. The third point I wish to emphasize is somewhat anticipated in the second. As far as the second imperative is concerned, undoubtedly formalization is of paramount importance in Structuralism. The relationship between Foucault and the latter is more complex than by now canonical post-structuralist readings of his work are willing to concede. Foucault credited Structuralism, which he saw primarily as an analysis of «the formal relations among indifferent elements» for the purpose of identifying «the structural invariant», with the merit of having put into question the status of the subject, that is, the idea that there exists a true subject of history able to actually make history assuring its continuity. There is no such a thing as the author and guarantor of this continuity, that is, «man’s sovereignty»<sup>30</sup>. Foucault fought against all hopes put in the search for the underlying patterns of thought in all forms of human activity based upon the presupposition that the myths of different cultures are, surprisingly perhaps, similar as a consequence of human characteristics being the same everywhere. Thus the archaeological perspective is one in which only the rights of the historical disciplines that manifest themselves independently from any transcendental constitution ready to impose a specific unitary form can be vindicated. These disciplines constitute a new type of anthropology.

Part of Foucault’s critical project was freeing Western thought from the imposition of ‘constituent consciousness’ responsible for the illusion of the unity of the sciences. In *The History of Madness*, first published in 1961 and subsequently, in a modified version, in 1972, while discussing Calvin’s position on human capacities, Foucault had already asserted that in its finitude, man, the subject in any humanist or transcendental philosophy, is «less a shaft of the great light than a fragment

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<sup>29</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Order of Things* in *Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 13, 15.

<sup>30</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archeology of Knowledge* in *Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 58-59.

of shadow»<sup>31</sup>. In *The Order of Things*, ‘man’ is seen as a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new ‘wrinkle’ in our knowledge. Man is «no more than a kind of rift in the order of things», just a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position that he has taken up in the field of knowledge. The subject, argued Foucault, will disappear again as soon as his knowledge will discover new forms. Yet man plays a role for in every culture, between the use of the ordering codes and the reflections upon order itself, there is the pure experience of order and its modes of being. This experience is where an individual sees himself as a subject<sup>32</sup>. Finally, in *The Archeology of Knowledge* Foucault conveyed that the very project of a transcendental ego must be brought to an end. The rights of the historical ego, the only existing ego, capable of thought and desire, manifesting itself anonymously and independently from any transcendental constitution, from ‘transcendental narcissism’, ready to impose specific subjective forms, must be vindicated.<sup>33</sup> This critique of subjectivity is one moment in Foucault’s anti-philosophy.

Another constitutive part of Foucault’s critical project was his critique of causality. He attacked the causality principle as it has been commonly experienced among historians. Often he referred to ‘mystified causality’. In an interview released in 1967, Foucault criticized the habit of treating history as the privileged locus of causality. This habit has led most historians to believe that there is no real doing history without causality.<sup>34</sup> There is general agreement among scholars that history ought to be a logically sound and descriptive discipline. In one of his methodological studies, Max Weber argued that in order to obtain objective historical knowledge, the historian must always seek to separate knowing from evaluating, the will to ascertain ‘the truth of facts’ from the need of defending one’s own ideals. So, establishing, preserving, or modifying any table of values, that is knowledge of what ought to be, is always to be distinguished from conceptually reconstructing and ordering factual data, which is knowledge of what is<sup>35</sup>. Foucault seemed to be in the need of taking distance from this tradition, but to the extent that he managed to do so, again, he did by philosophical means for philosophical purposes.

#### 4. The struggle against legal and political philosophy

One of the crucial moments of Foucault’s anti-philosophical struggle is constituted by his attack against legal and political philosophy, whose significant traces can be found in the course entitled *Society*

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<sup>31</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, Gallimard, Paris 1972; *History of Madness*, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, Routledge, London-New York 2009, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Order of Things*, cit., xvi-xxiv.

<sup>33</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, cit., pp. 219-232.

<sup>34</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Qui êtes-vous Professeur Foucault?* in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 1, pp. 601-620. See also *Who are you, Professor Foucault?* in J. R. CARRETTE (ed.), *Religion and Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1999, pp. 87-103.

<sup>35</sup> M. WEBER, *Die Objectivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis* in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 19 (1904), pp. 22-87.

*Must Be Defended*. These lectures occupy a strategic position in Foucault's intellectual adventure. They have been delivered between *Discipline and Punish*, published in February 1975, and *The Will to Knowledge*, the first volume of the history of sexuality, published in October 1976. The lectures, it has been observed, gave Foucault the chance to evaluate the findings of his early work and sketched important future lines of investigation. They constitute the meeting point between two axes. Along the first axis the political problem of power relations is encountered, along the second one the historical question of race. In the first perspective, Foucault invited to consider that power is not something that can be taken or exchanged, and it does not consist of an interest, a will, or a desire. Power is never deployed and exercised in the form of right under the auspices of, or even against, the law. Since it does not originate within the State, it cannot be deduced from the legal category of sovereignty, even though right, law, and sovereignty constitute a specific coding of power. Consequently, neither is resistance a matter of right, that is, of the natural right of an ideal subject in the state of nature. Power and resistance confront each other within a landscape of changing tactics. They generate a field of relations of force dominated by the logic of struggle. Their relations must therefore be examined in the strategic form of struggle, rather than in the juridical form of sovereignty. In the second perspective, Foucault proposed to stop looking at politics as the continuation of war by other means. Politics, instead, is war pursued by other means. Along this line he outlined a genealogy of racism<sup>36</sup>.

The course opens with a summary of the general features of 'disciplinary power', namely the set of specific powers applied to individual bodies by techniques of surveillance and normalizing sanctions within punitive institutions. It ends with an account of 'bio-power', namely of the set of power-techniques applied on a large scale to populations on account of their biological needs and characteristics. When we say that the urge to provide a concrete analysis of power relations - not of power - is the driving force behind the lectures, we must specify that abandoning the contractual and the possessive models of power, as well as the juridical model of sovereignty and the Marxist model, was at the top of Foucault's theoretical priorities. The critical dismissal in question was the means through which Foucault hoped to achieve his anti-philosophical deconstruction of power.

The studying of the concrete functioning of power relations is now to be conducted not on the basis of the analysis of the primitive terms of the relationship between State and individuals, by investigating, for example, what part of themselves or of their power, abstract individuals have surrendered in order to become subjects. Rather, it is to be conducted on the basis of the existing relations of subjugation, to the extent that the latter alone produce subjectivity as we know it. One of the major targets of critique was the juridical model of sovereignty. Foucault restated that principle that

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<sup>36</sup> A. FONTANA-M. BRENTANI, *Situating the Lectures* in M. FOUCAULT, *Il faut défendre la société. Cours au Collège de France 1975-1976*, eds. M. Bertani-A. Fontana, Éditions du Seuil-Gallimard, Paris 1997; *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. D. Macey, Penguin Books, London-New York 2003, pp. 273-293.

looking for the single form from which all forms of power derive is to be avoided. One must begin by realizing that all forms of power operate in their multiplicity, their differences, their specificity, and their reversibility. They constitute 'relations of force' that intersect, often in a conflicting way, with one another. We must not privilege the law as manifestation of power. We must identify the different techniques of constraint that are implemented through the law instead. In order to avoid reducing the description of power to the imperatives imposed by the juridical model of sovereignty, that is, in order to properly think about power in terms of 'relations of force', Foucault suggested to work primarily with the equation that connects power and war.

War is the factor allowing a proper analysis of power relations. Foucault claimed that a coherent and accurate historical-political account of power relations, differing from the traditional philosophical-juridical discourse organized around the problem of sovereignty, emerged in France and England after the end of the Wars of Religion, at the beginning of the great political struggles of seventeenth-century. This account saw the practice of war as the permanent basis of all institutions of power. War presided over the birth of the modern States, not the 'ideal war' imagined by the theorists of the state of nature. War constitutes «the secret motor of institutions, laws, and order». It remains «the cipher of peace» and the only factor able to put «all of us on one side or the other». On this ground Foucault criticized jurists and philosophers who pretended to act as disinterested subjects in search of a moderate position, one conducive of «an order that brings reconciliation». Such a discourse of detachment is an illusion or a trap. By contrast to the philosophic and juridical discourse organized around the problem of sovereignty and the law, the discourse that deciphers war's permanent presence within society is one having historic and political nature, one in which «truth functions as a weapon to be used for a partisan victory». It is a discourse that is «darkly critical» and, at the same time, «intensely mythical». This conclusion is puzzling, given the proximity of history and myth that Foucault established. Foucault insisted that it is necessary to seek «an explanation from below», one that does not explain things in terms of «what is simplest, most elementary, and clearest», but in terms of «what is most confused, most obscure, most disorganized, and most haphazard». The digression ends with an appeal to looking beneath the institutional surface in order to revive «the forgotten past of real struggles» and «the blood that has dried on the codes». «Fury», he claimed, «must explain harmonies»<sup>37</sup>.

The second 'grand' method in Foucault's critical project is genealogy undoubtedly. The genealogical perspective is animated by a genuine ethos of liberation. What 'buried' scholarship and the 'unqualified' knowledge of ordinary life have in common is that both they have been subjugated by the

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault proposed to interpret the political discourse used by the English Diggers and Levellers against royalty and the nobility, and by Henri de Boulainvilliers and others against royalty and the Third Estate in France, as a «discourse of race struggle». He claimed that the history of wars as «the wombs of States», developed between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England and France, turned around a «historically primal state of war that exists between two hostile races which have different institutions and different interests». See M. FOUCAULT, *Society Must Be Defended*, cit., pp. 265-272.

agents of the established hierarchy of erudition and sciences. What is at stake in both cases is the memory of innumerable struggles, namely «the very memory that had until then been confined to the margins», that is, «the meticulous rediscovery of struggles and the raw memory of fights». Against this background, Foucault called ‘genealogy’ the «coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories», which allows «to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics». Every genealogy is a combination of buried erudite knowledge and what actually people generally take to be ‘useful’ knowledge. Genealogical rediscovery, however, would not be possible without «the removal of the tyranny of overall discourses, with their hierarchies and all the privileges enjoyed by theoretical vanguards». The genealogical project is a way of playing local, disqualified, or non-legitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able not only to filter them and organize them into a hierarchy, but also to classify them in the name of true science that is in the hands of the few. It is not empiricism that runs through the genealogical project, nor does it lead to conventional positivism. Genealogies, explains Foucault, are not «positivistic returns to a form of science that is more attentive or more accurate». Instead, they are ‘anti-sciences’ that do not demand «the lyrical right» to ignorance, or invoke «some immediate experience that has yet to be captured by knowledge». These anti-scientific strategies and tactics constitute the ‘insurrection’ of the inferior and depressed bodies of knowledge. They primarily constitute an insurrection «against the centralizing power-effects that are bound up with the institutionalization and workings of any scientific discourse organized in a society such as ours». Here, I believe, we are dealing with a distinctive sociology of knowledge containing clear ethical elements such as, for instance, the obligation that users of the genealogical method have to conduct a true fight against the power-effects characteristic of discourses regarded as scientific. Compared to the attempt to inscribe all disciplines and knowledges in the power-hierarchy typical of science, genealogy is an attempt to set the bodies of historical knowledge free, or «to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse». The purpose of pursuing even the more ‘disorderly and tattered’ genealogies is to ‘reactivate’ the bodies of local knowledge against the scientific hierarchical regulation of knowledge and its power-effects. In conclusion, while archaeology is the method specific to the analysis of local discourses, genealogy is «the tactic which, once it has described these local discursivities, brings into play the de-subjugated knowledges that have been released from them»<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Society Must Be Defended*, cit., pp. 7-11.

## 5. The pragmatic components of Foucault's critique

Foucault's attempt to critically abandon all philosophies of power has important epistemological and normative presuppositions and implications. Examining their philosophical meaning, I believe, serves well the purpose set for the present investigation.

In the opening lecture of the course delivered at the Collège de France in the period January-April 1979, entitled *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault warned against the risk of taking notions such as sovereignty, the people, subjects, the State, and civil society as primary or given objects, which is precisely what social scientists, historians, and legal and political theorists usually do. They employ such notions as universals in the hope of properly accounting for the existing practices in the domains of politics and society. Instead of starting with universals as «an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices», Foucault suggested to start with existing practices and pass the corresponding abstract notions through «the grid of these practices», treating the latter as factors that generate self-understanding and self-rationalization. The occasion for addressing this issue was given by the will to grasp the ways in which the art of government has been conceptualized «within and outside government», namely to achieve a better understanding of «reflection *in* the practice of government and *on* the practice of government». He presented his decision to nullify the universals for methodological reasons - «let's suppose that universals do not exist», he said – and recalled to have taken the same decision in respect of the concept of madness. His intention had been not to examine whether history gives, or refers to, madness, thereby concluding that history tells that madness does not exist. Rather his deliberation had been that madness does not exist as a universal. Only thanks to such radical methodological decision, he argued, the question of what history can make of the different events and practices which are organized around the concept of madness could be properly addressed<sup>39</sup>.

On similar presuppositions, we may ask what history can make of the different events and practices which are organized around the concept of society. Following Foucault, we conclude that there is no unified substance pervading the myriad of particular events and practices that we commonly name 'society'. Yet, is there a theoretical possibility to treat society as a particular, whose knowledge can only be acquired through contingent experience? If a possibility of the kind were to be theoretically warranted by the will to represent society as a particular, not as a universal, the question of the philosophical meaning of this will would still beg an answer. Moreover, on what grounds would we then be able to detect a minimum degree of coherence and permanence within our experience of the events and practices that we name 'society'?

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<sup>39</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Naissance de la biopolitique. Cours au Collège de France 1978-1979*, eds. F. Ewald-A. Fontana-M. Senellart, Éditions du Seuil-Gallimard, Paris 2004; *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. G. Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke-New York 2008, pp. 2-3.

Paul Veyne opened his intellectual biography of Michel Foucault stating that the latter was a peculiar type of sceptic thinker, one who yet believed «only in the truth of facts, the countless historical facts that fill the pages of his books, never in the truth of ideas»<sup>40</sup>. If Foucault were a consistent radical empiricist in the epistemological sense, in order to be tenable his position would require either positing the existence of God as guarantor of the reality of such experience, even though on a strictly speaking empirical understanding of raw sense data a conclusion of the kind would be unacceptable – this solution, worked out by Berkeley, cannot be associated to Foucault – or positing the existence of a noumenal world accessible to our faculty of reason structured by the forms of our intuition and the categories of our understanding. This Kantian option too is untenable, also because Foucault explicitly took distance from Kant’s philosophy. Finally, we must assume that Foucault accepted that there is a degree of resemblance or shared properties between the events and practices justifying their falling under the same concept of society. The most plausible hypothesis, in my view at least, consists in arguing that Foucault accepted, without making it explicit, the pragmatist assumption that if there is a mental construct that works in practice the way that a universal would, the corresponding construct can be usefully employed as if it were a universal. Like nineteenth century pragmatist philosophers, Foucault too assumed to have vindicated the rights of the knowledge of the particular against the worship of the universal. I am convinced that to a large degree he accepted the principle that the only value and significance that abstract concepts have is that they might be useful in our unquenched search of new truths about singularities.

## 6. The normative components of Foucault’s critique

The recount of Foucault’s ethical concerns can conveniently start with an even partial scrutiny of Foucault’s intellectual self-understanding. In this context the desire to liquidate political philosophy plays an important role and has ethical implications.

One of the most pressing demands of emancipative thought is bringing political philosophy too to an end. The latter, Badiou suggested, may be defined as the programme which, holding the political as invariant factor in universal experience, accords philosophy the task of conceptualizing it. Evidently, in the case of normative political philosophy, this conceptualization generates analyses of the political that are regularly submitted to ethical judgment<sup>41</sup>. It is not surprising that Foucault’s work has developed in accordance with the demand of bringing political philosophy to an end for the sake of a ‘new liberation’, even though his intention to bring political philosophy, and philosophy *tout court*, to an end does not unambiguously govern his critical programme. After all, when Foucault specifies that he is

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<sup>40</sup> P. VEYNE, *Foucault*, cit., pp. 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> A. BADIOU, *Metapolitics*, cit., p. 10.

not interested in studying «the development of real governmental practice by determining the particular situations it deals with, the problems raised, the tactics chosen, the instruments employed, forged, or remodelled», but rather «the reasoned way of governing best and, at the same time, reflection on the best possible way of governing», he is practicing (political) philosophy to the extent that he clearly intends to make sense of the conceptualization of the art of government and of the reflection on such a conceptualization<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, Foucault's will to liquidate political philosophy is summarized in the first volume of the history of sexuality by his contention that «in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king»<sup>43</sup>. The statement fixes, perhaps for the first time in terms that are so radical, one of the most important critical targets of his work, namely, as I have already emphasized, the classic understanding of sovereignty, one that in Foucault's view is traditionally reserved to the 'theorising intellectuals' concerned with the need of speaking the truth in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth, or who had not yet discovered it. The question now is how to identify an ethical element in Foucault's struggle against political philosophy.

Purposely, I use the adjective 'ethical' instead of 'moral'. In Hegelian vocabulary, as it is known, the noun 'morality' and the adjective 'moral' are used to denote the type of morality grounded in one's own reason or conscience. Instead, the noun 'ethics' and the adjective 'ethical' are employed to denote customary duties embodied in a group or a society<sup>44</sup>. Like many other intellectuals, Foucault too experienced the desire to save his own work from the type of erudite irrelevance that, according to many, characterizes academic debates. Demolishing 'the ivory tower' of academia was thus part of a set of shared values. Most likely, many intellectuals, including Foucault, must have experienced such a desire as duty. Since this type of concern too is at the core of the practice of emancipative politics, the use of the adjective 'ethical' seems to be appropriate here.

Transforming political philosophy into the practice of 'the politics of difference', as well as placing philosophy under condition of emancipative politics, was intended to be the best strategy to make the border between theory and practice vanish, which is, indeed, what Foucault and many others of his generation felt as an ethically compelling action. Oddly enough, Paul Veyne claimed that Foucault was not the product of '1968 thinking'. For instance, he was an anti-dogmatic thinker who did not share the faith in democracy, human rights, and gender equality which many have learnt to regard

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<sup>42</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, cit., p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *La volonté de savoir*, Gallimard, Paris 1976; *The Will to Knowledge. The History of Sexuality: 1*, trans. R. Hurley, Penguin Books, London-New York 1998, p. 88

<sup>44</sup> Hegel contrasted *Sittlichkeit*, meaning 'ethical order' or 'system of duties' embodied in the laws and institutions of a society, with *Moralität*, the subjective will's awareness of its own freedom externalized in action. He subordinated the latter to the former with regard to their respective historical relevance. See G.W.F. HEGEL, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse* (1820-21), hg. E. Moldenhauer-M.K. Markus, in *Werke*, Bd. 7, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1970; *Philosophy of Right*, 105-114; 142-156, ed. T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1967, pp. 75-79; 105-110. Hegel also used *Moralität* to denote the bourgeois type of morality of the wealth-producing class. By contrast *Sittlichkeit* denoted the customs of the ruling, warrior class. See M. INWOOD, *A Hegel Dictionary* (1992), Blackwell Publishers, Oxford-Malden (Mass.) 1999, pp. 91-93, 191-193.

as political dogmas. He «sensed that that they were all fragile conquests, which, like everything in this world, would not last forever». On account of his anti-dogmatism «he was neither for nor against» these conquests. He suspended judgment. It is significant that Veyne himself admits that Foucault was not a nihilist in that he recognized the existence and the importance of human liberty, and has constantly welcomed the novelties that history was bringing about. He did not think that ‘disenchantment’, and the loss of all metaphysical and religious bases, ever discouraged the individual from experiencing beliefs, hopes, indignations and the desire to revolt<sup>45</sup>. In fact, Foucault has hardly ever suspended judgment, and the ‘events of May’ had a significant impact on the development of his ethical vision and work. In several occasions Foucault acknowledged that without the input of those events some of his most important and engaging researches would have never been produced. Foucault emphasized that in ‘the events of May’ many finally discovered that the masses no longer needed the intellectual to gain knowledge for «they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves». The intellectual’s role was no longer to place himself ‘somewhat ahead and to the side’ in order to «express the stifled truth of the collectivity». Rather, it was «to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, truth, consciousness, and discourse». The intellectual, Foucault concluded, must no longer struggle in order to ‘awaken’ people’s consciousness. The masses have been aware for some time that consciousness is a form of knowledge, and as such it has constituted the basis of a subjectivity that the bourgeoisie has taken to be one of its distinguished prerogatives. The struggle against the forms of power that transform the intellectual into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge and consciousness is theory and at the same time practice. Theory, says Foucault, is «the regional system of this struggle»<sup>46</sup>. Deleuze confirmed that the ‘events of May’ marked a period of extraordinary creativity and ferment for Foucault. It was then that the core of his interests shifted from the archaeology of knowledge to the genealogy of power<sup>47</sup>.

The fact that Foucault has not practiced a suspension of judgment in respect of certain issues of social crucial importance is also witnessed, for instance, in the preface written in 1977 for the English-language edition of *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), the first part of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. There Foucault enumerated the virtues/imperatives of living against all forms of fascism. Political action is to be freed from «all unitary and totalizing paranoia». Action, thought, and desire must be developed «by proliferation, juxtaposition and disjunction», not by hierarchy. Allegiance from the old categories of the Negative such as law, limit, castration, or lack must be withdrawn. What is positive and multiple must be given priority, and difference must be preferred over uniformity, flows

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<sup>45</sup> P. VEYNE, *Foucault*, cit., pp. 1-2, 127.

<sup>46</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Intellectuals and Power* in *Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 75-76. See also D. TROMBADORI, a cura di, *Colloqui con Foucault*, Cooperativa Editrice, Salerno 1981, p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> G. DELEUZE, *Un portrait de Foucault* in *Pourparlers: 1972-1990*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1990, pp. 139-161, 142.

over unities, and mobile and temporary, flexible, arrangements over systems. What is truly productive is not sedentary but nomadic. To be militant one does not have to be sad «even though the thing one is fighting is abominable». Desire must be liberated because it possesses revolutionary force. Thought must not be used to ground political practice in Truth. Rather political practice must be experienced as «an intensifier of thought». One should not demand of politics that it restore the ‘rights’ of the individual, as philosophy has defined them. What is truly urgent is to ‘de-individualize’ by means of «multiplication and displacement». Collective life, the group, «must not be the organic bond uniting hierarchized individuals, but a constant generator of de-individualization». Finally one must never be attached to power<sup>48</sup>. As far as his position in matters of human rights are concerned, it must be recalled that he repeatedly argued that there exists an ‘international citizenship’ that has its rights and its duties, and that «oblige one to speak out against every abuse of power», whoever its author and victims. «After all», he said, «we are all members of the community of the governed, and thereby obliged to show mutual solidarity»<sup>49</sup>. If, on the one hand, liberation from all forms of dogmatism constitutes the ethical horizon of Foucault’s project, it can still be argued that the constant refinement of his methods of analysis constituted a serious incentive to the practice of liberation as a living ethos.

## 7. The production of the subject and bio-power

Foucault has constantly viewed his work as an autobiography in progress and irremediably in fragments. He said that the problems he dealt with – madness, punishment, sexuality, power – were relevant from a personal point of view.<sup>50</sup> Even if he never devoted a book to power in particular, the problematic of power runs through all the writings, lectures and interviews of the 1970s. The analyses he made during that period were attempts to articulate alternative ways of analysing power, enriched both by the pressure of current events and by their own internal development. He once said that for a long time he naïvely identified power with the commands contained in the legal norms issued by the State. His studies on the establishment of clinical and psychological knowledge, as well as his direct experience of power relations within the French prison system in the early 1970s, caused a radical change of mind. He discovered that power is more a matter of discursive tactics and strategies than of rules imposed by an authority.<sup>51</sup> The question of power began to interest him in the mid-1950s against the backdrop of ‘two gigantic shadows’, the ‘two black heritages’ of fascism and Stalinism. Rather than

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<sup>48</sup> G. DELEUZE-F. GUATTARI, *L’anti-œdipe. Capitalisme et schizophrénie: 1*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1972; *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H.R. Lane, Continuum, London 2004, xiii-xvi.

<sup>49</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Confronting Governments: Human Rights in Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. J.D. Faubion, Penguin Books, London-New York 2002, vol. 3, p. 474.

<sup>50</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Intellectuals and Power in Foucault Live*, cit., pp. 74-82

<sup>51</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Les rapports de pouvoir passent à l’intérieur des corps*, entretien avec L. Finas, *La Quinzaine littéraire*, 247 (1977), 4-6, now in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 3, pp. 228-236.

power, understood as a universal substance, he intended to study the workings and the effects of power relations and practices of subjugation, which are not specific to the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, but they also exist in other regimes, including the contemporary liberal-democratic societies. In line with some of the basic intuitions of the first generation of scholars of the Frankfurt School, Foucault argued that in spite of their historical uniqueness and their own ‘internal madness’, fascism and Stalinism made extensive use of ideas and devices deeply rooted in Western political rationality<sup>52</sup>.

In the already mentioned preface to the 1977 English-language edition of *Anti-Oedipus*, Foucault presented the book by Deleuze and Guattari as an *Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life*. He attacked all forms of fascism, including the petty ones that constitute “the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives”. There is a fascism which exists in us all, the same that causes us to love power, namely the thing that dominates and exploits us.<sup>53</sup> Foucault’s analysis of power relations is part of a wider hermeneutical project aiming at creating adequate conditions for understanding how, in post-war Western societies, individuals who believe to be in a position of autonomy are ‘normalized’, transformed into docile subjects, hence into objects of knowledge destined to control and manipulation. He explained that the goal of his work throughout the 1970s has not been to analyse the phenomenon of power, neither to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. His objective has been to write a history of the different ways by which, in our culture, human beings are transformed into ‘subjects’. He identified three general ways part of this process that transform human beings into subjects. One way in which human beings are transformed into subjects through their objectivising is given by those modes of inquiry that style themselves as sciences. They transform human beings into subjects, for example, by the objectivising of the speaking agent (linguistics), of the productive and labouring agent (economics), and of the living being (biology). The second way in which human beings are transformed into subjects through their objectivising is given by ‘dividing practices’ in which the objectivising or reification of the agent is organized around dichotomies such as sane/insane, sick/healthy, normal/delinquent. The third way in one in which human beings turn themselves into subjects by themselves. This is the domain of sexuality. Thus, it is not power, but the subject, that now constitutes the general theme of his research<sup>54</sup>.

Foucault’s analysis developed along two lines: the first one is the line of ‘disciplinary power’, a power that is applied to the individual by techniques of surveillance, normalizing sanctions, and the panoptic organization of punitive institutions. The second one is that of ‘bio-power’, a regulative power that is applied to populations on a large scale through specific techniques of policing and government, the power that has, since the late sixteenth century, been exercised through the apparatuses and technologies of reason of State. According to Foucault, contemporary societies do no longer

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<sup>52</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Pouvoirs et stratégies*, entretien avec J. Rancière, *Les Révoltes logiques*, 4 (1977), pp. 89-97, now in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 3, pp. 418-428.

<sup>53</sup> G. DELEUZE-F. GUATTARI, *Anti-Oedipus*, op. cit., xiii-xvi.

<sup>54</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Subject and Power in Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 326-348, 326-327.

predominantly rely on disciplinary and coercive practices. Rather, they increasingly depend on a myriad of widespread, complex and articulated regulatory practices. The employment of expressions such as 'political anatomy', 'political technology of the body', and 'political investment of the body' indicates that the bio-political paradigm is operative in the mid-1970s.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault devoted his energies to the 'anatomic' and 'micro-physical' study of power relations. Power relations, he argued, have an immediate hold over the body. Surely, it is largely as a 'force of production' that the body is invested with relations of power and domination. Yet, its configuration as labour force is possible only because the body is caught up in a system of subjection and normalization. The body becomes a useful force only if it is both a 'productive body' and a docile 'subjected body'. In order to have subjection it is not necessary to deploy the traditional instruments of violence, terror or even ideology. The new forms of subjection may be direct and physical and, at the same time, very subtle. They may be calculated and technically organized. The science of subjugation is a particular knowledge of the body to be distinguished from the science of its functioning. Foucault calls the science of subjugation and the mastery of its forces 'the political technology of the body'. In spite of the coherence of its results, this technology is a diffuse power, rarely formulated in systematic discourse. It is a 'multiform instrumentation'. It cannot be localized in any particular type of institution or state apparatus. What the apparatuses and institutions activate and promote is a 'micro-physics of power'. The study of this micro-physics requires on the side of the power exercised over the body to be conceived not as a property, but as a strategy. Its effects of domination must be attributed not to an act of appropriation, but to dispositions, tactics, and techniques. It is thus necessary to decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, rather than a privilege that one possesses. The model to take as a point of reference is that of a 'perpetual battle' rather than that of a 'contract regulating a transaction' or that of 'the conquest of a territory'. Power is exercised rather than possessed, and it is not the privilege, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions, an effect that is manifested, and sometimes extended, by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, power relations are not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who seem to have no power. Power invests them all, is 'transmitted by them and through them', it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggles against it, resist the grip that power has on them. This means that power relations are the roots of social life, and they are not localized in the relations between the State and its citizens, or on the frontier between classes. Lastly, they are never univocal for they define 'innumerable points of confrontation', 'focuses of instability', each of which has its own risks of conflict, and of an at least temporary 'inversion of the power relations'. Eventually, the analysis of 'the political investment of the body' and 'the micro-physics of power' presupposes that «one abandons, where power is concerned, the violence-ideology opposition, the metaphor of property, the model of the contract or of conquest», and that, where knowledge is

concerned, «one abandons the opposition between what is interested and what is disinterested, the model of knowledge and the primacy of the subject»<sup>55</sup>.

According to Foucault, the 'political hold over the body' is one of the most important transformations occurred in the history of humankind. The second half of the eighteenth century is the moment of transition from one type of society based on discipline to one based on the practice of regulation. A new non-disciplinary technology of power emerged. This technology did not exclude disciplinary technologies, but it integrated them while introducing significant modifications. The nineteenth century marked the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living being. It was then that the biological came under State control and the law continued to be the predominant system of representation, of formulation, and of analysis of power<sup>56</sup>. A first seizure of power over the body in an individualizing mode, is followed by a second seizure of power that is not directed at 'man-as-body' but at 'man-as-species'. After 'the anatomo-politics of the human body', established in the eighteenth century, emerged, at the end of that century, 'a bio-politics of the human race'. From that moment onwards processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, together with a whole series of related economic and political problems, became bio-politics' first objects of knowledge and control<sup>57</sup>. Sovereignty as 'the right of the sword' - the right of life and death traditionally exercised in an unbalanced way in favour of death - declined not in the sense that it was completely replaced, but in the sense that it came to be complemented by «a new right which does not erase the old right but which does penetrate it». The right of the old sovereign was the right to take life or let live. The right of the new sovereign is the right to make live and to let die.

## 8. Conclusion

The core of Foucault's search of alternative ways of analysing power for critical purposes, is anti-philosophy that takes as its target four general philosophies of power: the legal theory of sovereignty, the psychoanalytic theory, the social contract theory, and Marxism. The desire to overcome these models in favour of an 'anatomical' or 'micro-physical' understanding of power, however, never prevented him from maintaining an uninterrupted dialogue with those theories of power. When it comes to examining the relations between power and political economy, for instance, Foucault kept on confronting the Marxist tradition. While according to Marx relations of domination in the work-place appear to be established solely by the play and the effects of the antagonistic relations between capital and labour, in Foucault's view relations of domination are possible only because of the subjugations,

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<sup>55</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Discipline and Punish*, cit., pp. 25-28.

<sup>56</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *As malhas do poder (Les mailles du pouvoir)* now in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 4, pp. 182-201.

<sup>57</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Society Must Be Defended*, cit., pp. 239-243.

training, and surveillance that have already been produced. According to Foucault it was not the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century that invented and imposed relations of dominations. It rather inherited them from the disciplinary mechanisms conceived of and implemented in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The bourgeoisie simply had to use them, to modify them by intensifying some and attenuating others. The works of Marx, argued Foucault in the mid-1960s, do not interpret the history of relations of production, but interpret a relation that is already giving itself as an interpretation<sup>58</sup>.

According to Jean Baudrillard, Foucault brilliantly managed to shift the focus of the lens so that it no longer points at power, but at the discourses that describe and engulf it. Foucault teaches us that power itself is no longer in power. In his writings we find «an interstitial flowing of power that seeps through the whole porous network of the social, the mental, and of bodies»<sup>59</sup>. In this respect one might agree with Grahame Lock's contention that a 'metaphysics of power' lies, after all, behind Foucault's attack against philosophy<sup>60</sup>.

Foucault invites us to move beyond the image of power as a limit set on freedom, even if this is commonly the general form of its understanding. Have Foucault's attacks against the theorization of power produced the desired outcomes? Has he managed to dismiss sovereignty *tout court* or just one model of it? Has he finally let historicity (the concrete) prevail over philosophy (the abstract) without doing philosophy? My contention is that the answers to these questions is negative. As far as the understanding of sovereignty is concerned, Foucault's critique presupposes elements that are constitutive of the model he intended to demolish such as the equation that links up State with sovereignty. Foucault and the classic theorists of sovereignty that he wished to criticize have one thing in common: the belief that true sovereignty is that which modern law and politics have produced between the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth centuries<sup>61</sup>.

Foucault sought to reverse a canon in Western philosophy by arguing that the reality of discourse is the condition of possibility for power and subjectivity. The opposite might still be the case. Perhaps discourse does not have the power that Foucault assigned to it in the same sense in which an age doesn't have a spirit. His argument, anyway, has circular nature: discourse is first derived from power, and then is used to explain power. So, Foucault's theorization may well appear to be, as Hegel put it, a

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<sup>58</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* in *Cahiers de Royaumont*, VI, Colloque de Royaumont (juillet 1964), Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1967, pp. 183-200, now in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, eds. D. Defert, F. Ewald, J. Lagrange, Gallimard, Paris 1994, vol. 1, pp. 564-579.

<sup>59</sup> J. BAUDRILLARD, *Oublier Foucault*, Édition Galilée, Paris 1977; *Forget Foucault*, trans. N. Dufresne, Semiotexte, Los Angeles 2007, p. 29.

<sup>60</sup> G.E. LOCK, *Michel Foucault (1926-1984)*, cit.

<sup>61</sup> F. MAIOLO, *Foucault e la sovranità*, Aracne Editrice, Roma 2012.

«reflection which is at home only in the finite», but «just as there is an empty breadth, so too there is an empty depth»<sup>62</sup>.

The archaeological method is at the hearth of Foucault's anti-philosophy. Philosophy, Badiou noted, accepts being confined to the melancholic proclamation of its own undesirability or of its well-deserved and imminent closure. Philosophy seems to be paralysed by its relation to its own history for it no longer knows if it has a proper place. Philosophy's closure is exemplified by what the sophist, ancient and modern alike, wishes to show, namely that there is no truth, and that its concept is useless and uncertain. Conventions, rules, genres of discourse and language games are all that exist<sup>63</sup>. In this context, truth still has a role to play as long as it is «born in consent and from consent». Not knowing how things 'really' are will make us free, emphasized Gianni Vattimo, only that which sets us free is truth. The latter is about discovering that «there are no ultimate foundations before which our freedom must come to a halt»<sup>64</sup>.

I would conclude arguing that Foucault's attack against philosophy, conducted by philosophical means for philosophical purposes, reflects the notion of philosophy that Foucault presented towards the end of his life. In the introduction of *The Use of Pleasure*, he repeated that most of his investigations are «studies of history by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to», although «they are not the work of a historian». All these studies constitute «a philosophical exercise». History and philosophy are interwoven in the sense that their object is «to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently». To think differently is one of Foucault's major ethical concerns. Philosophy itself amounts to think differently, it is «the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimizing what is already known». Not surprisingly, Foucault concluded that philosophy is «the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself». It is still what it was in times past, namely *askēsis*, «an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought»<sup>65</sup>. Probably at the hearth of Foucault's efforts to sustain the thought of difference lies the type of insurmountable difficulty that once Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed at with regard to the limit to the expression of thought. In order to draw a limit to thinking, and by extension to thinking differently, «we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit - we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought»<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> G.F.W. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, hg. E. Moldenhauer-K.M. Michels, in *Werke*, Bd. 3, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1986; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 1977, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> A. BADIOU, *Conditions*, cit., pp. 3-22.

<sup>64</sup> G. VATTIMO, *Nihilismo ed emancipazione. Etica, politica, diritto*, Garzanti, Milano 2003; *Nihilism and Emancipation. Ethics, Politics and Law*, trans. W. McQuaig, Columbia University Press, New York 2003, xxvi.

<sup>65</sup> M. FOUCAULT, *The Use of Pleasure*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Preface, with an English translation by C.K. Ogden and an Introduction by B. Russell, Routledge, London-New York 1996, p. 27.