

## **Reading Foucault**

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### **Limit-experience**

F credits Nietzsche, via Bataille, Blanchot, Klossowski with the motivating theme of the "limit-experience." This is the attempt to reach the other, the outside, by an experience that rewires the body and restructures the categories. The two are related: a centrally organized and hierarchized body--obediant and docile, "clean"--will produce arborific, State, categories centered on unity and presence. In general, bodily constitution conditions thought processes AND vice versa: "the soul is the prison of the body" writes F in DP: a certain conception of the body (that it is the prison of the soul) arises from and in turn structures bodily practices (enforced self-observation to detect flaws and internalize norms) that limit body potentials along predictable ("normal") pathways ("we do not yet know what a body is capable of," says Spinoza in the *Ethics*.)

In a way, F is looking for the "other" in all his books: madness, sickness, crime, abnormal sex are the great others to reason, health, law, and normal sex. In other words, he wants to investigate the ways "family values" have been constituted. Now the biographies demonstrate that it's undoubtedly true that F experienced in his own life many of these "deviances." But the proximate causes of his investigations, his personal motivations, aren't so interesting as the results, the demonstration of the historical power bases of modern human sciences.

### **Targets**

F's main targets are the "human sciences," modern systems for the constituting and studying of man as both object of natural/social forces and subject of personal/cultural meaning. Examples are psychology, criminology, "sexology," sociology, anthropology, economics, education, political science, etc., and their applications in "jury science," marketing, polling, etc.

### **Historical difference**

All F's works aim to demonstrate a historical difference between [at least] two different systems (either of knowledge, power/knowledge, or ethics). They all aim to challenge presumptions of historical progress by showing 1) the rationality of previous systems, which the present wants to consider as irrational, and hence in need of modern reform; 2) the contingency and motivation of current systems, which want to appear natural [invisible] and/or inevitable and/or progressive. As we can see on the chart, the major focus is the move from Classical to Modern, or the pivot of 1800, or the French Revolution or the Modern break.

The terms "break" or "rupture" come from Bachelard and Canguilhem, two French philosophers of science. F aims to demonstrate discontinuities in history, as a supplement to the *Annales* (Braudel) school notion of the *longue durée*. That F is more interested in demonstrating such breaks than explaining them in terms of change in mode of production got him in trouble with Sartre, who accused him of a structuralist betrayal of "history" (by which Sartre presumably means an edifying narrative). It's all very complicated stuff, so let's address this question later in the course after we've read some of F's work to see what he is doing in person as it were.

### **Methodologies**

Archaeology of knowledge: *episteme*, historical *a priori*, positive unconscious:

basic knowledge structure [*savoir*] of an age, laying out rules for formation of objects, subject-positions, concepts, and strategies that allow historically valid knowledge [*connaissance*]; thus F is not necessarily a sceptic: he doesn't question objectivity of a science, but only shows its historical constitution; there is also a counter-history in the early books too, though, showing bourgeois morality in modern psychiatry, for instance. however, there's little hint as to how to mobilize this knowledge about knowledge

Genealogy of power/knowledge [*pouvoir/savoir*]: *dispositif*

relation of discursive and non-discursive practices. knowledge needs and helps power [to gain knowledge, you need control-power; once you have knowledge, you can predict and further control]; power needs and helps knowledge [to justify and exercise power you need knowledge; power-control allows for knowledge]. for example, the prison [nondiscursive, power: bodies in space] allows close observation and description [discursive, knowledge], while such knowledge helps justify and construct better prisons and so on .... This is a modern, dispersed, productive power, discovered by the people in the 60s: internalized constraints and positive pleasures vs. centralized repression by the State (not that this disappears)

genealogy, by thematizing power/knowledge, is thus political in a way archaeology is not: it shows the historical contingencies of our current system.

Problematization of ethics: subjectizing practices

how we make ourselves the plastic object of self-work; such subjectifying practices are different in different ages and hence produce different subjects; death of subject only in sense of shift of subject from start to finish of an investigation: from explainer to what is to be explained