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A HUMANIST CRITIQUE OF

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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IV. Abstract

Foucault's archaeological method is contrasted with that of a humanist history. The contrast highlights strengths and weaknesses found in Foucault's approach. He is right to reject a concept of objective knowledge based on pure facts and pure reason; and he is right to reject the idea of the autonomous individual uninfluenced by the social context. But he is wrong to extend these rejections to an utter repudiation of respectively our having reasonable knowledge of an external reality and our being creative and rational agents. A recognition of these strengths and weaknesses is used to develop an alternative account of the human sciences to that of Foucault's The Order of Things. This alternative history shows his proclamation of the death of Man to be mistaken.

A HUMANIST CRITIQUE OF
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE HUMAN SCIENCES[1]

In The Order of Things, Foucault tries to show that the human sciences, and the humanism on which they are based, derive from a particular episteme. They are products of a particular semiotic code that governs all of Modern thought, and they will disappear with the Modern episteme in what will be an arational break sometime in the future. Foucault develops his critique of the human sciences using a novel archaeological method, which he contrasts with a traditional historical one associated with the very humanism he is criticising. His archaeological method uncovers the epistemes, the historical a prioris, that underlie the thought of any given epoch, where an episteme is an arbitrary set of concepts defined by their relations to one another: his archaeological method does not concern itself with the efforts of rational agents to make sense of the world. Here Foucault is sceptical about the possibility of language referring to the world, and so of the possibility of our having objective knowledge. Thus, his epistemes are historical a prioris in that their concepts arbitrarily construct the world for us rather than referring to objects in the world. Moreover, Foucault is sceptical about the idea that the human subject is a rational and creative agent. Thus, his epistemes are historical a prioris in that their concepts decide what individuals can and can not think rather than being products of the rational deliberations of particular individuals. In what follows, I want, first, to outline briefly strengths and weaknesses of Foucault's archaeological method when viewed from the perspective of a modest humanism, and, second, to use this outline to develop an alternative account of the nature and problems of the human sciences.

History or Archaeology

Although humanists believe that the individual is an agent capable of making choices for reasons that make sense to him, they need not insist that the individual

makes choices using a pure reason which is not influenced by society. A modest humanism can accept, therefore, that both the subject and human reason necessarily exist only against the background of a particular social context that influences their nature. Such a modest humanism will find two main strengths in Foucault's method both of which reflect his emphasis on the influence of society on individual reasoning. The first strength of his method is a rejection of pure facts and pure reason. Nothing is present to us as an independent and certain fact: all our facts are constructed at least in part by our theories. Thus, Foucault is right to insist that our concepts play a role in constructing our understanding of the world. Historians should recognise that all of our ideas of things are in part theoretical constructs. To experience things as objects we also have to categorise and interpret them in terms of an understanding of the world. Thus, Man, conceived as the subject of the human sciences, is not given to consciousness by pure experience or pure reason alone. Rather Man is at least in part a theoretical construct, and so something that changes through history along with our broader understanding of the world. But this need not imply what Foucault himself concludes, namely, that Man is an arbitrary product of an arational episteme.

The second strength of Foucault's method is his rejection of individuals as wholly autonomous beings. Human subjects exercise their agency only against social structures which influence their performances. Thus, Foucault is right to insist that something akin to an episteme provides a useful context for an explanation of the beliefs of individuals. Historians should recognise that any individual always arrives at the ideas he does under the influence of his particular social context. Moreover, the intellectual background to an individual's beliefs must consist of concepts that stand in certain relations to one another. This, however, is not because Foucault is right in his semantic theory, but rather because all sets of beliefs take this form and epistemes arise out of the sets of beliefs of particular individuals. Thus, a modest humanist can accept that there is a movement from epoch to epoch, with each epoch being characterised by a dominant set of ideas. But this need not imply what Foucault

himself concludes, namely, that epistemes are monoliths which fix or limit the beliefs of the individuals within them.

It should be clear by now that from the perspective of a modest humanism the main weaknesses of Foucault's method arise from the extreme nature of his rejection of both objective knowledge and human agency. For a start, to deny the existence of pure facts and pure reason is not to deny that we can have reasonable knowledge of an external reality. The first weakness of Foucault's method, therefore, is his outright rejection of the idea that our knowledge refers to an external reality.[2] He is wrong to represent our understanding of the world as a mere product of theoretical categories: he is wrong to say "we must not seek to construe these [concepts] as objects that imposed themselves from outside, as though by their own weight and as a result of some autonomous pressure, upon a body of learning" (Foucault, 1970: 252). Our encounter with the world acts as a prompt to our ideas, even if the way we make sense of this encounter depends in part on the theories that we happen to hold. Historians should treat the ideas they recover not as arbitrary sets of concepts, but rather as attempts to comprehend the world in such a way that we can find our way about within it. Our concept of Man, for example, is a theoretically constructed object, but it is constructed as part of a cluster of theories with which we attempt to make as much sense as we can of a world we have no option but to interact with. Our concept of Man is in large part a product of our attempts to make sense of our encounters with the world. Here the second weakness of Foucault's method is his outright rejection of the idea of reasonable grounds for knowledge. He is wrong to insist that our understanding of the world is entirely arational with different epistemes giving rise to entirely incommensurable sets of concepts. Instead modest humanists can defend an idea of objective knowledge as based on a reasonable comparison between rival sets of beliefs. Historians can compare two sets of beliefs to see which provides a better understanding of the world. They can judge whether or not a particular shift of ideas did or did not represent an epistemic advance. Our concept of Man changes over time

as we modify our view of the world in response to our interactions with it, and these modifications might be of a sort that enables historians to compare our earlier and later beliefs. Far from being an arbitrary product of a particular episteme, therefore, Man might be an object of which we actually are acquiring better and better knowledge.

In addition, to deny the possibility of our escaping from our social backgrounds is not to deny that we can act creatively according to reasons that make sense to us.[3] The third weakness of Foucault's method, therefore, is his outright rejection of individual agency. Individuals can act creatively in ways that are neither fixed nor even properly limited by the particular social contexts in which they have their being. They can break out of things such as epistemes. Thus, Foucault is wrong to insist that "in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge" (Foucault, 1970: 168). The thought of an era consists of a variety of perspectives, each of which has its own particular character, and these various perspectives need not be reducible to a monolithic structure. Historians, unlike Foucault, should record conscious heterodoxy as it appears in competing outlooks and partial breaks within a given era. Here the final weakness of Foucault's method is his outright rejection of human reason. Individuals can decide to do things for reasons that make sense to them from their own particular standpoint. Thus, Foucault is wrong to represent the history of ideas as a succession of arbitrary epistemes the content of which derives from the way in which their core semiotic concepts relate to one another. He is wrong to describe the thought of each era as decided by "the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse" (Foucault, 1970: xiv). The thought of an era is a product of the way individuals adopt ideas for reasons that make sense to them from their perspectives. Whereas Foucault's archaeology can not but present an episteme exclusively "in terms of conditions and a prioris established in time" never "by describing the state of knowledge that preceded it and what it has provided by way of

- as we say - 'original contributions'," historians should explain change as a product of individuals exercising their reason (Foucault, 1970: 208). And whereas Foucault's archaeology can not but present "quasi-continuity on the level of ideas and themes" as "a surface appearance" where "the system of positivities was transformed in a wholesale fashion," historians should allow that change can go along with genuine continuity (Foucault, 1970: xxii).

This brief analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Foucault's approach points to a framework for analysing his study of the human sciences from the alternative perspective of a modest humanism. Here a humanist historian might engage with Foucault's archaeology in the following ways.

- 1. Historians might begin by exploring the way in which an episteme came into being. Foucault has to ignore this question of origins because he can not account for change - he can talk only of arational breaks. Historians, in contrast, should explain the emergence of the episteme by examining the reasons that individuals had for adopting its characteristic ideas.

- 2. Next historians might explore the content of an episteme so as to highlight the strengths of Foucault's approach. They might show how much of the thought of the era fits into a system of conventions that resembles Foucault's description of the episteme.

- 3. Historians, however, will insist that the nature of the system of conventions that they thus uncover derives not from a fundamental semiotic code, but rather from the coherence of the beliefs of numerous individual subjects all of whom adhered to something like that system of conventions.

- 4. Next historians might consider the similarities between an episteme and the one that it replaced. Moreover, doing so might enable them to compare the two epistemes to see whether or not the change from the one to the other brought epistemic growth. Foucault, in contrast, can not do this because of his commitment to the arational and incommensurable nature of all epistemes.

- 5. From the historian's perspective, an episteme is merely the dominant set of conventions of an era, so they also might draw out competing outlooks and inter-epistemic breaks within the relevant era. Whereas Foucault attempts to reduce the whole of the thought of each era to a single static episteme, historians might present, indeed probably will present, an episteme as a system of conventions which faced challenges from other systems of conventions, and which was itself subject to significant change.

- 6. Historians might conclude by examining why an episteme declined in prestige. Foucault has to ignore this question because he can not account for change. Historians, in contrast, should explain the demise of the episteme by examining the reasons that individuals had for rejecting its characteristic themes.

The Human Sciences

Foucault's avowed purpose in the The Order of Things is to provide an archaeology of the human sciences. He argues that the human sciences exist only in the Modern episteme. They could not have arisen earlier because they study Man as Subject - Man as a being who is capable of representing the world to himself - and this idea of Man is a product of the Modern episteme. From the perspective of a modest humanism, however, Foucault's account of Man and the human sciences probably will exhibit the strengths and weaknesses I have briefly outlined in his archaeological method. A humanist historian, therefore, might apply the six-point framework outlined above so as to assess the conclusions Foucault reaches in The Order of Things.

1. The first weakness here is Foucault's inadequate account of the genesis of Man and the human sciences. Foucault argues that Man arose as a product of a semiotic code that constitutes the historical a priori of the Modern age, a semiotic code which itself emerged in an inexplicable and arational break with its Classical predecessor. In contrast, a modest humanism suggests that people's view of the nature

and capacities of Human Beings develops along with broader changes in an explicable history of ideas. Man, therefore, is the view of the nature and capacities of Human Beings that arose as this explicable historical process led into the Modern era. Although I can not here give anything like sufficient weight to the rival traditions found within each era, I can gesture towards the outline of a history of the different ways in which people have conceived of Human Beings, and so the human sciences, since the Renaissance, the starting point of Foucault's own study.

The dominant view among Renaissance intellectuals was that humans are part of a single web of signatures and resemblances. Humans embody an Idea, and this Idea both appears in the visible marks that God has placed upon them and links them to the great chain of being through their similarities with other objects. The order of things, within which the Idea that humans embody exists, defines the individual's purpose for him. We are to be what God has made us. Nonetheless, Renaissance humanists in particular argued that although humans are part of the unchanging order of things, they have an active faculty which enables them to influence their own fate within this order (Skinner, 1978, vol. 1). Renaissance humanists emphasised the special dignity of humans as beings who possess freedom. The freedom of the will became, therefore, at least as important as the immortality of the soul in defining the special properties of humans. Pico, of course, conveyed this idea through the words that he gave to God at the start of his famous Oration:

> Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, and form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature (Pico della Mirandola, 1948: 224-225).

The freedom of humans is such that they can improve themselves. Although reflection on the power of fortune sometimes inspires a pessimistic mood among Renaissance humanists, the dominant conviction that they express is of the power of humans at least to some extent to master their fate through the exercise of virtue. Indeed, a stress on the pursuit of human excellence through virtue led the civic humanists to shift the locus of morality from a divine order to the social requirements of the good life for humans. They argued that civic freedom rests on an independent citizenry who are willing to put the common good before factional interests. Many Renaissance humanists even championed a return to antiquity because they thought the Greeks and Romans had possessed a free spirit that was lost in the Middle Ages.[4] Moreover, their faith in the model of antiquity then led them to the study of history. However, whilst Renaissance philologists and antiquarians developed a fairly critical approach to their sources, the pursuit of history generally remained a more literary activity which was concerned primarily with the morals to be drawn from an uncritical reading of past texts. The Renaissance historian unfolded a narrative chain of deeds and their consequences so as to reach a moral conclusion.

The Classical era ushered in a rather different view of the nature and capacities of human beings. Individuals were divorced from nature and society in a way that they rarely were before. The individual as subject lies outside the world as object; the two are no longer connected by a set of resemblances that instantiate the order of things. Moreover, because the order of things is lifeless, individuals could no longer take their purpose from it. Instead they had to identify their purpose by using their reason so as either to uncover the one that God has ordained or perhaps even to construct one for themselves. Their nature as human beings derives from a reason that is within them, not from their place in the order of things. This view of human beings typically leads towards an instrumental stance towards the rest of nature. Individuals use the world to discover and to realise their purpose. The world does not define their purpose for them. What is more, individuals as distinct identities are

different from others in a way that they were not in the Renaissance. We can see this in the emergence of a new concept of Society during the Classical era. Throughout the sixteenth century, the word "society" generally referred to fellowship conceived as the active possession of various individuals. On a few, rare occasions "society" had a more objective sense, as, for instance, in "Society of Jesus", but even then it referred only to particular groups that were formed by association for distinct reasons. In the seventeenth century, however, the word "society" starts to be used to refer to the objective institutions in which a group of people live, and even to the abstract idea of such a set of institutions. Society is objectified, together with nature, as something that is external to the individual. The individual stands entirely alone in a state of nature, lacking fellowship, association, and even the Society within which fellowship and association arise. Thus, although a civic humanism derived from the Renaissance continued to attract some intellectuals, and to influence more, the Classical worldview inspired a new view of our nature and the freedom to which we can aspire.[5] In the Classical era individuals often appear as pre-social beings with a fixed nature who live in a mechanical universe. Similarly, freedom is more individual in nature than civic, and the product of an act of reason more than an act of will. The free individual is one who uses his reason to obtain an instrumental control over the outer world and his own nature. The free individual is one who uses his reason to act in accord with his own rational purpose and so arguably God's will.

Early in the Classical age, the new empiricism wrought a transformation in the writing of history. Bacon and other empiricists inherited much of the tradition of the Renaissance humanists in that they too saw history as a literary activity with a practical, moral purpose (Clark, 1974). Their commitment to an empirical science, however, led them to insist on the need to recount the history factually before then erecting a moral structure upon it. Bacon even argued that an empirical study of actual lives provides the basis for a science of human nature. The new empiricists, therefore, typically wrote much less idealised accounts of past lives and actions than

did Renaissance scholars. Also early in the Classical age, a sceptical challenge did much to undermine the very idea of history. Descartes and others introduced stringent criteria for what can count as knowledge, doing so partly in order to condemn the hermetic belief in natural magic that flourished during the Renaissance. Many Classical philosophers defined knowledge in terms derived from mathematical certainty, and in doing so they thereby relegated history to the problematic realm of hearsay. Thus, scholars such as Hobbes were inspired by the ideal of replacing the history of the humanists with a new science. They set out to uncover universal laws of human nature and society by deduction from an analysis of the pre-social individual. The work of Locke and later Newton introduced a well-known break in Classical thought, a break that had a clear impact on the human sciences. Here a Newtonian science that studied a system governed by forces became increasingly popular as a model for scholars who studied human beings. Montesquieu and the theorists of the Scottish Enlightenment, for example, strove to develop a new science of society in place of both the narratives of the Renaissance humanists and the deductive theories of the atomists. They described social systems as products of the interaction of different types of forces - manners and customs, civic and economic practices, and constitutions.

Romanticism inaugurated yet another new view of the nature and capacities of human beings, a view that has dominated much of the Modern era. Here humans appear as living beings within a historical order. Man and the universe are not united in a single rational order. Rather, the inorganic realm is alive and so able to create an order for itself in a way that the organic realm can not. Our nature and purpose as humans do not come from a given order but rather from the creative activity of our inner selves. Indeed our inner selves and our imagination provide us with the means with which to challenge what some Modern thinkers see as the oppressive effects of a disengaged and instrumental reason. Here the romantic movement pitted feeling and imagination against the Classical concern with reason and order. It elevated the

unique lines of a living nature over and above the formal symmetries of the Classical era. Thus, although the traditions of the Renaissance and Classical era continued to attract some support, the Modern era witnessed a change in the dominant view of human nature and so the freedom to which we can aspire. Modern Man came into being. Man is defined here by his creativity - his ability to realise his own unique nature - as much as by his rationality - his ability to comprehend and control the world about him. The Modern era retains the individualism of the Classical age, but the identity of the individual now comes not only from a universal reason but also from a unique and personal set of feelings. Two features define this new Modern view of the individual. First, Man has inner depths: individuals have a unique personality based on their deep emotions, dispositions, and the like; they possess an inner nature that can be either expressed and fulfilled or repressed and unrealised. Second, Man has a creative and imaginative faculty: individuals create their own nature, and so the world around them, by shaping their inner feelings through their own particular actions. Their originality enables them to bring something entirely new into being; it enables them to go beyond all previous models and all previous sets of rules. As living beings, we have inner depths that are unique to us and that endow us with a creative imagination. The free individual, therefore, is one who expresses his unique being and so realises himself. The good of the individual consists in being true to his inner self for to live well is to live creatively in accord with one's own unique nature.

Modern thinkers, beginning with Herder, often attacked eighteenth-century philosophies of history for treating the past as if it was the present, that is, for ignoring the importance of the different historical contexts of various customs, practices, and institutions.[6] The Moderns took a non-mechanistic view of individuals, society, and culture as the historical products of Man's creative endeavours. Thus, although the traditions of the Renaissance and Classical era continued to attract some support, the Modern era also witnessed a change in the dominant view of how to study human beings and their activities. The Modern human sciences came into being. Whereas

sciences such as biology, and to some extent economics, study the way in which Man sustains himself as a living being, the human sciences study the creative activity of Man; they study Man as a being who creates his own world through the exercise of his own imagination. In the Modern era, then, the study of human nature takes the form of a psychology that focuses on the inner depths of individuals and their unique, personal biographies; the study of society takes the form of a sociology that concentrates on the evolution of different social formations out of human activity; and the study of art focuses on the genius of the author, or even the genius of a whole community as it appears in things such as folk tales and language.

2. The preceding account of the emergence of Man and the Modern human sciences explains why Foucault's account of their content captures many important features of Modern thought. Here Foucault highlights "the modern themes of an individual who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology, but who also, by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping, has acquired the right, through the interplay of those very laws, to know them and to subject them to total clarification" (Foucault, 1970: 310). He argues that whereas in the Classical episteme humans exist outside of a nature that they come to know through a process of naming and classifying, in the Modern episteme Man is both the subject of knowledge and an object of knowledge. In the Classical episteme, humans come to know things by representing them, so the object is linked to the subject by discourse - language ties humans to their representations of things. In the Modern episteme, in contrast, humans come to know things because of the way they live, labour, and speak, so the object is linked to the subject by the concept of Man, that is, the concept of humans as living, labouring, and speaking beings. In the Modern episteme, Man as an object produces Man as a subject. It is important to recognise that Foucault here defines Man as humans conceived as beings who have knowledge and can be studied as such. Thus, when he says that Man did not exist prior to the Modern episteme, he means only that humans conceived as the possessors of

knowledge were not earlier also themselves an object of knowledge. His concern with semiotic codes leads him to define Man in restricted epistemological terms as a being who represents the world to himself and can be studied as such. In contrast, a focus on the romantic basis of much modern thought suggests a broader view of Man. Here we have defined Man as a being who possesses both inner depths and a creative imagination. Man is an autonomous individual for whom freedom consists in the expression of a unique and pre-social nature.

According to Foucault, economics, biology, and philology - the empirical sciences - study the way in which Man as an object, a part of nature, can become Man as a subject, a knower of nature. Economics, biology, and philology explore the way in which labour, life, and language produce individuals who are capable of attaching value to things, perceiving things, and describing things. Philosophy and the human sciences, in contrast, study Man as a subject, a knower of nature. They explore respectively what it is to have knowledge in general, and the particular values, perceptions, and descriptions with which people have represented the world they live in to themselves. For Foucault, therefore, the human sciences occupy three epistemological regions, each of which corresponds to one of the empirical sciences. Psychology corresponds to biology: as biology takes Man as a living being, so psychology studies the way this living being represents to himself the world in which he lives. Sociology corresponds to economics: as economics considers Man as a labouring being, so sociology studies the way this labouring being represents to himself the society in which he labours. And literary analysis corresponds to philology: as philology considers Man as the user of language, so literary analysis studies the texts this user of language leaves behind him. The human sciences deal, then, with the representations that Man makes of the world. Moreover, each of them characteristically does so in terms of a model that is taken from the empirical science to which it corresponds: psychology typically deploys a biological language of functions regulated by norms; sociology typically uses an economic language of

conflicts conducted according to rules; and literary analysis typically deploys a philological language of meanings that occur within a system of signs. Nonetheless, attempts can be made to base any one of the human sciences on any one of these models taken from the empirical sciences. Foucault even argues that the methodological controversies that bedevil the human sciences follow from their precise location within the Modern episteme. It is because any one of them can make use of the model associated with any other one that method has been a subject of intense debate within them all.

Foucault argues that both philosophy and the human sciences study the subjective aspect of Man: they look at the meaning that Man's activities have for him, not at his activities as such. Here the human sciences differ from philosophy in that they focus on the Other as the source of Man's representations. Whereas philosophy studies knowledge and meaning as the product of a reflective and rational human consciousness, the human sciences study knowledge and meaning as the product of the unconscious, social forces, and language. The human sciences are, therefore, inherently critical of Man's self-consciousness; they perpetually demystify our representations by showing how they arose out of the Other, that is, the things we exclude from our conscious self-understanding. The human sciences concern themselves with the arational, unthought origins of human knowledge in norms, rules, and systems of signs. Here Foucault's belief in semiotic codes compels him to define the Modern human sciences in restricted terms as necessarily concerned with the unthought origins of human activity. He can not define them to include all of the various ways in which Modern scholars have tried to comprehend Man and his activities. He has no option but to define them exclusively by their structural relationships to other epistemological areas within the Modern episteme. As he explains, "it is not Man who constitutes them [the human sciences] and provides them with a specific domain; it is the general arrangement of the episteme that provides them with a site, summons them, and establishes them - thus enabling them to

constitute man as their object" (Foucault, 1970: 364). In contrast, our account of Man as a creative, imaginative being with inner depths suggests a broader view of the Modern human sciences. We can define them by their object: the human sciences study the representations that Man produces through his creative and imaginative activity, and while they might do so by appealing to the unthought, they also might do so by appealing to the conscious mind.

3. Once we adopt the broad understanding of Man and the human sciences outlined above, we can proceed to engage with Foucault's account of the Modern predicament. Here Foucault's analysis of the human sciences is also a critique them. He describes them as premised on a concept of Man of which he is critical. He argues that Man is not a fixed object of which scholars can acquire knowledge, but rather the product of an arational episteme.

There is a sense in which Man did indeed arise only as an integral part of the outlook of the Modern era. As we have seen, the Modern concept of human nature owes much to the romantic concern with life and history, with the imagination and the unique, and, above all, with the creative nature of the will. However, there is also a sense in which Man is just the most recent expression of our constantly developing understanding of the nature and capacities of Human Beings, an understanding that existed in the Renaissance and Classical era as well as in the Modern period. Foucault's prophecy of the death of Man is, therefore, highly ambiguous. Few people would disagree with him if he means only that the Modern understanding of our nature and our capacities might change. But the drama and notoriety of his prophecy derive from the implication that the very idea of Humans Beings having any sort of nature and capacities will disappear. This implication makes sense, however, only if we assume that the very idea of ourselves as beings with certain capacities can exist only as a product of the semiotic code that structures his Modern episteme, and we can assume this only if we accept a strong version of the thesis that concepts are defined wholly by their opposition to other concepts in a synchronic system. Once we

reject this view of our concepts, as we must, then the fact that our view of our nature and our capacities might change will not lead us to conclude that any such change must entail the demise of the very idea of Human Beings having a nature and capacities. Man might die: Human Beings will only change.

Foucault argues that the concept of Man is not only the arbitrary product of an arational episteme but also an irredeemably confused concept. His critique here focuses on the epistemological issue raised by his idea that Man is both the subject and the object of knowledge. The problem is: how can an empirical being, formed by life, labour and language come to have knowledge of the world? To have knowledge of the world, one must distinguish truth from falsity, so one must have access to a transcendental reason to give one critical standards by which to do so. But then the problem is: how can an empirical being shaped by biological, economic, and linguistic forces adopt a transcendental stance? Kant responded to this question by appealing to an analytic of human finitude. He said that the things which limit our knowledge - time and space - also make it possible. According to Foucault, however, Kant failed to define adequately the relationship between Man's transcendental and empirical being. Later philosophers, Foucault continues, have then oscillated between a positivism, which reduces the transcendental to the empirical, and an eschatology, which reduces the empirical to the transcendental. Marxism, for instance, moves uneasily between a dominant positivism according to which our representations are determined by our material circumstances, and a minor eschatology according to which history is governed by the final realisation of a philosophical truth. Similarly, phenomenology moves equally uneasily between a dominant idea of pure experience and a minor idea of the body and culture as the empirical bases of such experience. Foucault even suggests that we should not be surprised, therefore, at the conjunction of Marxism and phenomenology in the work of Sartre precisely because they are thus just two forms of the one reductionist project. What, we might ask, of Heidegger and others who attempted to avoid the problems of the empirico-transcendental doublet by

turning to history as the mode of our being? Foucault argues that this turn to history also fails. The turn to history reproduces the oscillation between positivism and eschatology as one between the retreat and return of the origin. The empirical dimension of Man appears in the retreat of the origin. Because Man is the product of life, labour, and language, human history always points back beyond itself to these empirical forces. No matter how far back we go, there always will be empirical forces behind the human activity we encounter. Thus, the origin of Man continually retreats from us. The transcendental dimension of Man appears in the return of the origin. Because Man creates his own representations of the world, human history always arises out of this human activity. Meaningful action always presupposes the prior constructive activity of consciousness. Thus, the origin of Man continually returns to us.

The problem with Foucault's critique of Man is its focus on a semiotic code that allegedly defines the whole of the Modern episteme. To be within this semiotic code, his critique of Man must be epistemological, but because it is epistemological, it does not seem to have anything to do with liberating us from tyranny in the way that Foucault suggests it does. Surely, after all, the existence of an epistemological difficulty can not be equated with a restriction on human freedom. Here our alternative perspective points to a looser concern with the various concerns that people have expressed with a broader, shifting view of Man as a creative and imaginative being who possesses inner depths. Many of the romantics argued that Man's creative nature was the product of a divine spirit immanent within nature. Absolute knowledge and unconditioned autonomy are given to Man precisely because he partakes of a universal spirit. It is difficult to untangle all the factors that combined to undermine this romantic view of nature as a spiritual power within Man. One important factor, however, surely must be Darwinism which clearly suggests that we should see Man as the product of evolution conceived as a blind process, not spirit conceived as a final cause. Anyway, for any number of reasons the romantic idea of

nature as a spiritual power within Man came to seem implausible, and the demise of this romantic idea brought two vital concerns to the fore. The first concern was with the status of human knowledge. The withdrawal of divine spirit as the conjunction of object and subject, raised something like the epistemological question Foucault that thinks bedevils the whole of modern thought. How can Man transcend his subjectivity so as to attain objectively valid knowledge? Perhaps our knowledge is relative to our particular location in a way that makes nonsense of the very idea of objective truth. The second concern was with the social context of human freedom. The withdrawal of divine spirit as the unconditioned part of the individual posed a problem for the very idea of the autonomous individual. How can Man transcend his social context to attain true freedom? Perhaps the social context determines what we do in a way that makes nonsense of the very idea of freedom.

According to Foucault, the confusion at the core of the Modern episteme points to its collapse, the death of Man, and the end of the human sciences as we know them. He does not claim to have an alternative at hand since what actually will emerge must depend on an arational epistemic shift. Nonetheless, he does claim to see new possibilities in Nietzschean philosophy and in the counter sciences of psycho-analysis, ethnology, and linguistics. These different modes of thought all herald the fall of the Modern episteme because they all make problematic the very concept of Man. Here Foucault argues that the psycho-analysis of Lacan, the ethnology of Le[/]vi-Strauss, and the linguistics of Saussure, focus on the Other as a product of impersonal structures, not on the Modern concept of Man. Whereas psychology explores the way in which the unconscious acts as a source in Man of his conscious representations, psycho-analysis, at least as developed by Lacan, approaches the unconscious itself as a product of structure. Lacanian psycho-analysis examines the general conditions of unconscious representations: it shows how the principles of Death, Desire, and Law constitute a structure that underlies the unconscious. Whereas sociology explores the way in which social norms created by Man's economic activity

influence his representations, ethnology, at least as developed by Le[/]vi-Strauss, relates the social norms themselves back to structural oppositions. Le[/]vi-Strauss's ethnology examines the structural invariables within which social norms have their being: "it suspends the long 'chronological' discourse by means of which we try to reflect our own culture within itself, and instead it reveals synchronological correlations in other cultural forms" (Foucault, 1970: 376). The work of Saussure notwithstanding, Foucault thinks that still more must be done before linguistics can take its proper place alongside psycho-analysis and ethnology. When a structural linguistics does take its proper place, however, it then will provide a model for both psycho-analysis and ethnology; it will do so simply because they study the unconscious and social norms conceived as formal systems of signs akin to a language. In general, therefore, Nietzschean philosophy and the counter sciences explore the conditions outside Man that make Man possible. They investigate "the region that makes possible knowledge about man in general" (Foucault, 1970: 378). They locate the basis of our knowledge of Man in synchronic, structural oppositions, not in the history of Man's life, labour, and language. They point beyond the Modern episteme to the death of Man.

Actually, however, we should approach the work of Nietzsche, Lacan, Le[/]vi-Strauss, and Saussure, not as does Foucault, as indicative of an impending epistemic shift, but rather in the context of the concerns that we have found to be raised by the demise of romanticism. Here Nietzschean philosophy relates in part to the question of whether or not Man can transcend his subjectivity and thereby attain objective knowledge. The modern idea that Man creates his representations, which change over time, raises the question of how these creations relate to the world as it is. Hegel bridged the gap between our changing representations of the world and the world as it is by appealing to a universal spirit within all things that unfolds itself through history so as to arrive at truth. With Schopenhauer, whose main targets were Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, the romantic belief in nature as a divine spirit gives way to one of

nature as a neutral, amoral force. Nature as spirit no longer provides a means of uniting our subjective representations with objective knowledge. Instead Schopenhauer saw the self, or subject, as a will that distorts representation, or the world as object. He adopted an antirationalism in which knowledge appears as a product not of reason alone but also of the unconscious activity of will. Crucially, of course, Nietzsche owed much to Schopenhauer. He identified the creative, subjective side of Man with the will to power. He espoused a relativist and instrumental view of knowledge. He described the representations Man makes of the world in a way that points towards irrationalism.

The counter-sciences relate in part to the question of whether or not Man can transcend his social context so as to attain not only objective knowledge but also true freedom. The romantic idea that Man creates his history through his autonomous, imaginative activity arose alongside the continuing influence of the eighteenth century search for a Newtonian science of society. Moreover, several nineteenth-century social scientists tried to fuse the two: Saint-Simon and Comte espoused a scientistic determinism that incorporated a romantic idea of organic development, and, similarly, Marx's historical materialism transformed a Hegelian idea of spirit into a scientistic determinism. All of these Modern social scientists were heirs therefore to a Classical traditions that prompted them to see the development of society as itself determined by social or historical laws. Nineteenth-century social science raised the question of how these laws relate to the free actions of individuals. Saint-Simon, Comte, and Marx bridged the gap between social laws and free individuals by portraying the latter as the outcome of the former. The historical process will end in the realisation of rational autonomy. Here the positivists looked to enlightened industrialists, the Marxists looked to the proletariat, and both justified doing so by reference to the laws that allegedly govern the historical process. However, when people came to look upon nature as blind and amoral, they lost faith in a historical process governed by rational autonomy as a sort of final cause. Thus, Saussure, and others such as

Durkheim, began to investigate social facts, while putting questions about the free actions of individuals to one-side in a methodological gesture. Saussure and Durkheim focused on the social background against which individuals act. They approached Man as if he were a product of objective social facts. They adopted a methodological determinism according to which human agency should be studied as if it were the product not of the individual consciousness but rather of the hidden operation of social forces. Crucially, the structuralists, of course, owed much to Saussure. Le[/]vi-Strauss and Lacan followed Saussure in conceiving of performance, or <u>parole</u>, as a manifestation of structure, or <u>langue</u>, and this then led them on to reject the very ideas of a free human subject.

4. It is difficult to see how we could return to the romantic idea of a divine spirit immanent within nature and governing history. After all, the theory of evolution really does teach us that nature is blind; nature is governed by a process of descent that operates according to the amoral criteria of natural selection, not by a spirit that operates as a sort of final cause. It implies that Man arose from a chance occurrence whose consequences were shaped by the organic and inorganic environments. Man is not a manifestation of a universal and unconditioned spirit. In so far as the post-romantic theories of Nietzschean philosophy and the counter-sciences do not fall foul of Darwinism in the same way as romanticism does, can look upon them, therefore, as part of the broad progressive movement of human knowledge. The crucial point here, however, is the advance in the natural sciences. It is the successes of modern biology that compel us to turn away from the romantic belief in nature as a spiritual power within Man.

5. The fact that Darwinism precludes the romantic idea of an immanent spirit within Man does not mean, however, that we have no option but to adopt the theoretical positions associated with Nietzschean philosophy and the counter-sciences. Here Foucault ignores the existence of rival traditions within the Modern episteme. There are alternatives to irrationalism and structuralism.

Let us concentrate exclusively here on the issues of how Man can escape his subjectivity so as to attain knowledge of the world, and how Man can escape his social context so as to attain freedom. In doing so, we can distinguish at least three types of response to these issues all of which are present within the Modern episteme. The first possible response is to deny the possibility of Man having either knowledge or freedom. The irrationalism of Nietzschean philosophy and the structuralism of the counter-sciences provide examples of this type of response. The second possible response is to deny that subjectivity and the social context constitute barriers respectively to human knowledge and human freedom. Certainly Foucault ignores a very strong empiricist strand within analytical philosophy which provides a prominent example of this response. Many contemporary empiricists still think that we have pure perceptions of the world, that is, perceptions which are unaffected by our particular situation. Man, they thus imply, can have objective knowledge simply because he can perceive the world as it really is. Similarly, Sartre argues that we are autonomous beings who possess an inner space where we can make free choices unaffected by our particular social context. The third possible response to the dilemmas that afflict modern thought is to try to steer a course between the first two. I want to emphasise here that it is possible to defend less absolute concepts of knowledge and freedom than those associated with romanticism without thereby denying the very possibility of either knowledge or freedom. One example of this possibility is Popper's evolutionary epistemology. According to Popper, our place in the evolutionary process provides us with a sort of guarantee that our representations are not wholly inadequate to the world even though we can not be sure that any of our representations correspond exactly to the world. Although our knowledge does not have the certainty the romantics thought, it still is not irrational in the way Nietzsche suggests. Similarly, many social democrats argue that Man can be free, if not autonomous, where the nature and extent of his freedom depends on the social context in which he has his being. Although we can not escape from the influence of the

society in which we have our being, society still does not fix, nor even limit, the actions that we might try to perform in the way the structuralists often suggest.

Fully to grasp the complexity of the rival intellectual traditions of the post-romantic era, we must recognise also that people can combine any of these responses to the problem of knowledge with any of these responses to the problem of freedom. For example, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and later others such as D. H. Lawrence, espoused some form of antirationalism whilst also defending something akin to the romantic idea of an unconditioned freedom. Schopenhauer thought that Man could escape from the will into a realm of freedom by means of a pure aesthetic contemplation, and especially contemplation of music. Likewise, Nietzsche saw Man's will as a creative power capable of freely affirming both the world and himself.

6. I have reached the end of my humanist alternative to the account of Man and the human sciences found in The Order of Things. This end is not an account of an episteme as a self-sufficient structure with no basis in the reasoning and creativity of individuals. It does not consist of a description of an impending arational shift from a monolithic Modern episteme to an equally monolithic post-humanist one. Rather the end is an account of langue based in parole. It consists of a bold overview of the way in which numerous individuals now subscribe to all sorts of competing and overlapping traditions. One of these traditions is a form of romantic humanism in which pure knowledge and free autonomy are guaranteed at least as possibilities. Another is that exemplified by Foucault in which all forms of reasonable knowledge and human agency are rejected in favour of various forms of irrationalism and structuralism. And yet another is the modest humanism I took as both my starting point and my conclusion - a modest humanism according to which we can have reasonable knowledge but not certainty based on pure facts or pure reason, and according to which we can act rationally and creatively but not entirely free from the influence of the society in which we have our being. It is these three traditions, and

perhaps also others, with their different answers to the problems of knowledge and freedom, that now constitute the thought of our time.

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[1] An earlier version of this essay appeared in the Italian journal Storia Della Storiographia. Here I would like to emphasise only that as a direct response to The

Order of Things, it does not consider either Foucault's subsequent criticism of that work [notably in The Archaeology of Knowledge] or the suggestions for a rather different history of the human sciences one can find in his later work [notably Discipline and Punish and A History of Sexuality].

[2] I develop the epistemology underlying the ensuing brief critique of Foucault in Bevir, 1994.

[3] I develop the view of the subject underlying the ensuing brief critique of Foucault in Bevir, 1996.

[4] The place of a literary history in Renaissance has been emphasised by Skinner (1978, vol. 1); while the role of philologists, jurists, and antiquarians has been explored by (Kelley, 1970).

[5] The persistence of the civic strand of this Humanism through the Classical era is emphasised - perhaps over-emphasised - by Pocock (1975).

[6] The continuities between Modern historicism and the Enlightenment have been highlighted by Reill (1975).