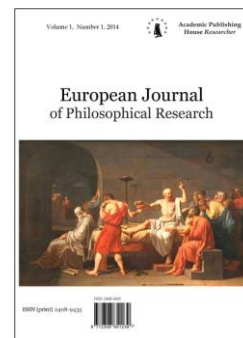


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UDC 1

## **Michel Foucault: Structures of Truth and Power**

Sribas Goswami

Serampore College, West Bengal, India  
PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology  
E-mail: sribasgoswami@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The concept of regime of truth clearly refers to the well-known circularity Foucault establishes between power and knowledge: we should speak of a 'regime' of truth because truth is produced, sustained, valorized and regulated by a series of mechanisms, techniques and procedures that are 'political' if we understand this term the way Foucault does: politics has to do not only with institutions, but with the complex and constitutive field of power relations within which we ordinarily live, and at the same time truth itself reinforces and induces effects of power. A regime of truth is thus the strategic field within which truth is produced and becomes a tactical element in the functioning of a certain number of power relations. The idea that truth gives us no choice, that truth necessarily forces us to accept it and build up our conduct in accordance to it, is an extremely dangerous ethico-political trap that Foucault can help us to unmask and overcome. The present paper discusses the various dimensions of truth and power as narrated by Foucault.

**Keywords:** philosophy; government; regime; subjectivities; truth; discourse.

### **Introduction**

The concept of Truth in western philosophy has all along enjoyed an authentic, indubitable, unquestionable, certain and sacrosanct status as genuine, real and valid. This would be evident even if we give a cursory look at a few comments. Plato said: "And isn't it a bad thing to be deceived about the truth and a good thing to know what the truth is? For I assume that by knowing the truth you mean knowing things as they really are"; "The philosopher is in love with truth, that is, not with the changing world of sensation, which is the object of opinion, but with the unchanging reality which is the object of knowledge", truthfulness. He will never willingly tolerate an untruth, but will hate it as much as he loves truth. And is there anything more closely connected with wisdom than truth?"; "What is at issue is the conversion of the mind from the twilight of error to the truth, that climbs up into the real world which we shall call true philosophy".

"When the mind's eye rests on objects illuminated by truth and reality, it understands and comprehends them, and functions intelligently; but when it turns to the twilight world of change and decay, it can only form opinions, its vision is confused and its belief shifting, and it seems to lack intelligence." Aristotle observed, "The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousand fold"; "Plato is dear to me, but dearest still is truth". Rousseau's comment was: "Falsehood has infinity of combinations, but truth has only one mode of being". Helvetius said: "Truth is a torch that shines through the fog without dispelling it". In Hegel's words, "Truth in

philosophy means that concepts and external reality correspond”; “The courage of the truth is the first condition of philosophic study”.

Thus, it has been thought quite in the nature of things that there is truth or reality out there and it is the goal of human knowledge to reach, grasp, capture and attain this truth. Knowledge that can do so is acknowledged as authentic and true. It is further believed that this authentic knowledge can be properly expressed and truth or reality can thus be represented with clarity and exactness through our language. Language represents a reality or truth that exists independently of it. Language hypothesizes a direct correspondence between the signifier (the sound or written sign of, say, ‘cat’) and the signified (the concept of the cat); between the referent (the real, natural, biological cat which is truth out there, if any at all) and the signified; it pretends itself to be a mirror-image of the world. The ‘linguistic turn’ in contemporary philosophy, however, problematizes this traditional relationship between language and truth or reality. It rejects the instrumentalist, referential, correspondence function of a supposedly transparent language with respect to reality or truth. The question ‘how does language work?’ is one of the challenging questions of current philosophy. We use language with such ease that we hardly ever think how we do it. But our use of language has much to do with our ability to think and do things which make us human. Language shapes the way we think, perceive and communicate. Language constructs the reality that we represent. There is no language-independent reality, and truth, contrary to what Hegel believed, cannot be correspondence. This leads to the conclusion that language is not politically neutral, for the language we speak both enables and constrains what we think and experience. The mechanisms of language are enmeshed in institutionalized forms of power and this was elaborated by Foucault who, however, preferred the concept of ‘discourse’ to language.

#### **Truth – a creation of discourse:**

Since its beginnings with Socrates, philosophy has typically involved the project of questioning the accepted knowledge of the day. Later, Locke, Hume, and especially, Kant developed a distinctively modern idea of philosophy as the critique of knowledge. Kant's great epistemological innovation was to maintain that the same critique that revealed the limits of our knowing powers could also reveal necessary conditions for their exercise. What might have seemed just contingent features of human cognition (for example, the spatial and temporal character of its objects) turn out to be necessary truths. Foucault, however, suggests the need to invert this Kantian move. Rather than asking what, in the apparently contingent, is actually necessary, he suggests asking what, in the apparently necessary, might be contingent. The focus of his questioning is the modern human sciences (biological, psychological, social). These purports to offer universal scientific truths about human nature that are, in fact, often mere expressions of ethical and political commitments of a particular society. Foucault's "critical philosophy" undermines such claims by exhibiting how they are just the outcome of contingent historical forces, and is not scientifically grounded truths.

Foucault put forward the notion of the historical, pure and absolute truth in Western philosophy. He showed that discourses provide the limits to what can and cannot be said or heard. ‘Truth’ is historicized. In 1977, he said, “My aim is not to write the social history of a prohibition but the political history of the production of ‘truth’” (Power and Sex’: 1988(a). Things meant something and were ‘true’ only within a specific historical and discursive context. No form of thought could claim absolute ‘truth’ outside the play of discourse. Foucault’s primary concern is not to discover truth, but to understand how truth is formed. The question is not whether our notion of truth is correct, whether a particular knowledge of us is true or false, whether our thought of truth is authentic; on the contrary, the question is how do we think of truth in a particular way and not in any other way, how do we develop a notion of a correct knowledge, and how do we think at all. He draws our attention to the very process of how our thoughts are formed and take shape, particularly our thoughts of truth. He is interested to think out how we think at all in a definite mode in a specific age. He believes that statements about the social, political or moral world are rarely simple true or false. In ‘Truth and Power’, he said that the problem is to see historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false (1980). Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and make function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques

and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. He said, “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse”.

An incident, cited by P. Rabinow, will make his position more clear. Foucault and Chomsky once appeared on a Dutch TV show for a debate on the topic ‘Human Nature: Justice versus Power’. For Chomsky, there is a human nature, a bio-physical structure underlying the mind. But Foucault avoids the abstract question: does human nature exist? And asks instead: How has the concept of human nature functioned in our society? Taking the sciences of life of 18<sup>th</sup> century as an example, he draws a distinction between the actual operational categories within a specific discipline at a particular historical moment and those abstract concepts like ‘life’, or ‘human nature’. ‘These abstract notions, he said, have had very little importance in the internal changes of scientific disciplines. He said, “It is not by studying human nature that linguists discovered the laws of consonant mutation, or Freud the principles of the analysis of dreams, or cultural anthropologists the structure of myths. In the history of knowledge the notion of human nature seems to me mainly to have played the role of... designat(ing) certain types of discourse in relation to or in opposition to theology or biology or history”. In the last analysis, he does not take a stand on whether or not there is a human nature. Rather, he changes the subject and examines the social functions that such concepts have played in the context of practices “such as economics, technology, politics, sociology which can serve them as conditions of formation, of models, of places, etc.... what(it is) in social forms that makes the regularities of science possible”. For him, there is no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that is beyond history and society. His strategy is to advance without recourse to universals for he is suspicious of universal truths. Foucault does not refute them but each time he encounters the universal categories and the grand abstractions, he historicizes them. He discovers the relations of specific scientific disciplines and particular social practices (1984).

When Foucault wrote *Madness and Civilization* (first published in 1961), he dealt with the problem of the political status of science and ideological functions which it could serve. He did not choose exact sciences like theoretical physics or organic chemistry because that would be excessively complicated. He rather chose psychiatry since its epistemological profile is a low one and psychiatric practice is linked with a whole range of institutions, economic requirements and political issues of social regulation. In case of *The Birth of the Clinic* (first published in 1963), he chose medicine because it is profoundly enmeshed in social structures. It is generally believed that science has progressively matured. But Foucault noticed in case of biology, political economy, psychiatry, medicine, etc., this is not so smooth. In medicine, for instance, up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there is a certain type of discourse whose gradual transformation broke, within 25 or 30 years, not only with its ‘true’ propositions, but also, with the ways of speaking and seeing, the whole ensemble of practices which served as supports for medical knowledge. These are not simply new discoveries; there is a whole new ‘regime’ in discourse and forms of knowledge. Foucault’s problem was: ‘How is it that at certain moments and in certain orders of knowledge, there are these sudden take-offs? But the important thing is not that such changes can be rapid and extensive, or it is that this extent and rapidity is only the sign of something else: a modification in the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true. It is question of what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are finally scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. There is a problem of the regime, the politics of scientific statement. At this level it is not so much a matter of knowing what external power imposes itself on science, as of what effects of power circulate among scientific statements, what constitutes their internal regime of power, and how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification (“Truth and Power”: 1980)

Thus, much of his work focuses on discourses related to the creation of the human sciences, such as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychology, and sociology, some aspects of medicine, linguistics, penal practice and criminology, sexual conduct. With the Enlightenment, these human sciences developed with illuminated several aspects of the body and mind of the individuals. New truths were discovered, new knowledge’s were advanced, and new disciplines were emerged. This advent of the human sciences was generally considered as a great achievement of the Enlightenment, as steps towards truth, freedom and progress through acquisition of knowledge. Foucault, however, wanted to show that growth of these sciences and scientific statements were not

something so innocent, not something so lying for above power, politics and social conflict. He showed how the emergence of these were connected with the contemporary needs of capitalism, disciplines of the body and mind of the individuals, standardization and homogenization, societal realization, need for employment and utilization of work forces and resources, requirements of new social institutions, social forces and conflicts, economic demands, new mechanisms of power and also the will to power and will to truth. The intellectual's justify their identity by drawing a line between the domain of knowledge, seen as that of truth and freedom, and the domain of exercise of power. Foucault said, "What struck me, in observing the human sciences, was that the development of all these branches of knowledge can in no way be dissociated for the exercise of power" ('On Power': 1988(a) ). True that there are psychological and sociological theories that are independent of power. "But, generally speaking, the fact that societies can become the object of scientific observation, that human behavior became, from a certain point on, a problem to be analyzed and resolved, all that is bound up, I believe, with mechanism of power- which, at a given moment, indeed, analyzed that object (society, man, etc.) and presented it as a problem to be resolved. So the birth of the human sciences goes hand in hand with the installation of new mechanism of power". Each society creates a 'regime of truth' according to its beliefs, values, and mores. He identifies five traits of the political economy of truth in Western societies: truth is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is bordered in the social body, now withstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of whole political debate and social conformation ('ideological' struggles) ('Truth and Power' : 1980).

Foucault sees "the political problems of intellectuals not in terms of 'science' and 'ideology', but in terms of 'truth' and 'power' ". His focus is upon questions of how some discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of 'truth' (or, which counts as truth), and dominate how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world, whilst other alternative discourses are marginalized and subjugated, yet offer sites where hegemonic practices can be contested. He has looked at social construction of madness, punishment and sexuality. His view of discursive formation governed by rules presents a particular view of truth : (a) truth is always dependent in a particular discursive formation; there is no underlying meaning within or imposed on the things of our world; (b) The truth or knowledge one possesses about something rests within the relations of statements inside a discursive formation. His recurring lesson is that the nature and limits of the thinkable, both in theory and in practice have changed more often, more radically and more recently the medical science, history, psychology, philosophy or sociology tends to assume. Concepts such as normality or sexuality, through which we know and think ourselves and our identities, are defined by him as contingent and potentially dispensable historical constructs. He rejects the Enlightenment concept of ultimate truth about society. The true/false division is a historically constructed division. Different eras and cultures have different ideas about what truth is, or what kind of truth matters. Foucault says that for 6th century Greeks, a person's words were true when they did things. True discourse meted out justice; it prophesied the future, not merely announcing what was going to occur, but contributing to its actual event. And yet, by the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the highest truth no longer resided in what discourse was, nor in what it did: it lay in what was said. And if we jump to 16<sup>th</sup> century England, to speak the truth has come to mean giving a correct description of observable, measurable and classifiable objects. Thus, truth has a history. In the modern era, to tell the truth, to acquire knowledge, means detached observation and description of a reality 'out there', not participation in construction/reconstruction. On the assumption that there is a fixed reality, and that to know it is to know it is as a detached observer, are based on our educational institutions, research practices, knowledge validating institutions, and so on. The modern will to truth is a truth as representation of a reality already given and structured. Language is as if a transparent medium: [W]e must resolve ourselves to accept three decisions which our current thinking rather tends to resist..... to question our will to truth; to restore to discourse its character as an event; to abolish the sovereignty of the signifier". One must reconsider whether Truth as representation of observable,

measurable, categorizeable objects is the only important kind of truth. One must acknowledge the reality of chance, and in particular, the possibility of discourse leading to radical and disruptive chances. Discourse is not just a matter of stating what is; it does things, changes things, has effects, functions as a real event, and is never fully predictable. We must abandon the quest for a complete system, or for invariant, inviolable realities, or for ultimate meanings. Language can also become the medium through which meaning is lost. When the plurality of possibilities is reduced to the Truth, language is forced into the role of purveyor of a univocal representation of reality. This is the power that condemns the other to silence, to invisibility. Foucault made us aware of this dangerous relationship between language of truth, discourse and power. He asks, “the very question of truth... the manner in which it developed (initially made available to the wise, then withdrawn by men of piety to an unattainable world where it was given the double role of consolation and imperative, finally rejected as a useless notion, superfluous, and contradicted on all sides) - does this not form a history, the history of the error we call Truth? Truth, and its original reign, has had within history”. The theme of originating experience asserts, in the case of experience, that even before it could be grasped in the form of a *cogito*, prior significations, in some ways already spoken, were circulating in the world i.e. there is meaning out there which we find.

In a lecture (1976), Foucault said how he was concerned with the *how* of power. He tried to relate its mechanisms to two points of reference, two limits: on the one hand, to the rules of right that provide a formal delimitation of power; on the other, to the effects of truth that this power produces and transmits, and which in turn reproduce this power. “Hence we have a triangle; power, right, truth”. The traditional question of political philosophy was: how is the discourse of truth or philosophy able to fix limits to the rights of power? Foucault posed a different question, more down to earth and concrete: “what rules of right are implemented by the relations of power in the production of discourses of truth? What type of power is susceptible of producing discourses of truth that in a society such as ours are endowed with such potent effects?” Thus, in the Western society, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We were subjected to the production of truth. In Western society, however the relationship between power, right and truth is organized in a highly specific fashion. He said, “we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands... in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit”. We must produce truth, as we must produce wealth, indeed in order to produce wealth. We are subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power (“Two Lectures”: 1980). Foucault notes: the problem is not changing people’s consciousness- or what’s in for the production of truth; it is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time (“Truth and Power”: 1980: 133).

### **Discourse and knowledge**

For Foucault, it is discourse, and not the subject, which produces knowledge. In each historical period, discourse produces forms of knowledge, objects, and practices of knowledge which differed from period to period, with no necessary continuity between them. Knowledge is an invention behind which lies something completely different from itself: the play of instincts, passion, impulses, desire, fear and the will to appropriate. Knowledge is produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other. Foucault sees all knowledge including historical knowledge through the prism of discursive formations and techniques. For instance, there may always have been homosexual forms of behavior. But ‘the homosexual’ as a specific kind of social subject was produced, and could only make its appearance within the moral, legal, medical and

psychiatric discourses, practices and institutional apparatuses of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with their particular theories of sexual perversity. Knowledge about and practices around all these subjects were historically and culturally specific. Foucault is not saying that homosexuality is a social construct, and nothing more. He is not saying that modern society invented the homosexual, like it invented aeroplanes. Instead, he seems to believe that the homosexual as a type was constructed in a particular form at a particular historical juncture (the late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and in a particular place (Europe and North America) by particular discourses (science, psychology, the law) which gave homosexual particular significations (the invert, the deviant, the psychological specimen) and that this had particular effects.

Foucault considered the ways in which the speech of madmen was considered in the Middle Ages: their words either fell into a void, rejected the moment they were proffered, or else men deciphered in them a naive or cunning reason. Whether excluded or secretly invested with reason, the madman's speech did not strictly exist. Mad speech is outside discourse, neither true nor false within any accepted discourse, but inhabiting a void. That helps to show the rules of exclusion that govern discourses and do not/cannot recognize a whole range of speech that do not conform in terms of objects, ritual, or right to speak. So the opposition between true and false is a kind of discursive exclusion. This kind of discourse is produced by a will to knowledge or will to power, wherein discourses discipline us: a will to knowledge emerged which sketched out a schema of possible, observable, measurable and classifiable objects; a will to knowledge which imposed upon the knowing subject, taking precedence over all experience, a certain position, viewpoint and functions. Discourse is incapable of recognizing the will to truth which pervades it; and the will to truth, having imposed itself upon us for a long, is such that the truth it seeks to reveal cannot fail to mask it. This will to truth, like the other system of exclusion, relies on institutional support: it is both reinforced and accompanied by practices such as pedagogy, the book system, publishing, libraries, the learned societies in the past, and laboratories today. But it is accompanied by the manner in which knowledge is employed in society, the way in which it is exploited, divided and attributed. Scientific understanding of the body, for instance, were not so much based on unbiased, empirical discovery but on the social and cultural relations and conceptions that reigned prior to science and were required for the maintenance of power relations in the modern scientific world.

Within our own language community we fail to notice the way in which we constitute what we talk about by such arbitrary language practices that have become second nature to us. Suppose a society called everything slightly red 'red' and grouped purple along with red in the process. And compare this to a society that called everything slightly orange 'orange', included red (but not purple) under the category, but also yellow. How would these two societies be able to talk about the colour of things? They would be using different language maps to organize colours and a simple translation from one to the other appears simply impossible. There are the implicit rules we use that work together to form this map of the world around us. These are necessary for appearance of objects of discourse. There are prohibitions about speaking of certain things (don't talk sex, its dirty); rules which establish institutional bodies as the authority and spokespeople for the creation of an object of discourse; rules concerning who is allowed to speak/ write. We listen to some (the learned), reject others (the insane). Credibility is given for having accomplished certain conditions. Certain ways of producing discourse enable listening (ways to write academic/ scientific discourse). There are rules for ritual of production, for particularly acceptable sites for discourse, rules for proper forms that concepts and theories must assume to be accepted as knowledge, rules as to the proper arrangement of statement (scientists always report hypothesis before findings), and stylistic rules. Only certain people may participate in generating certain types (lay people cannot make laws for computers).

### **What are discourses?**

Foucault use the term in different senses. According to Gordon, discourses are "identifiable collections of utterances governed by rules of construction and evaluation which determine within some thematic area what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effects" ('Introduction': 1980). In 'On Foucault's Concept of Discourse', M.Frank said that a discourse is an utterance, or a talk of some length (not determined), whose unfolding and spontaneous development is not held back by any over rigid intentions (1992). He shows that in *The Order of Things* (first published in 1966), discourses was described as a homogeneous order. But in *The*

*Archeology of Knowledge* (published in 1969), discontinuity is stressed. This means not only discontinuities between discourses which appear in historical succession (as stated in *The Order of Things*) but also discontinuities between discourses which are contemporary. *The Archeology of Knowledge*, in structuralist tradition, breaks down discourse into its constructive parts, sentences, statements. Foucault admits he used it in three distinct ways: “Finally, instead of making the rather hazy meaning of the word ‘discourse’ more distinct, I think that I have multiplied its meanings: sometimes using it to mean the general domain of all statements (‘enonces’), sometimes as an individualisable group of statements... and sometimes as an ordered practice which takes account of a certain number of statements” (1992).

Discourses are associated with language and the written or oral text. At this level, it challenges the concept of ‘language, as an abstract system and relocates the whole process of making and using meanings from the abstracted structural system into particular historical, social and political conditions. It is the way in which language is used socially to convey a broad sense of historical meanings. It is language identified by the social conditions of its use. Such a language can never be ‘neutral’ for its bridges between our personal and social worlds. It can never be ‘objective, or ‘detached’ because it draws upon myth and fantasy. It can never be totally free from the socio-cultural and political influences and economic interests in which it was produced and disseminated. Discourse reorganizes itself merely as one, not the only, representation of the world with only an arbitrary nexus existing between the signifier and the signified. As the pretense of language disappears, all that remains is its function as political representation: its nature and its virtues as discourse. The question of whether discourses are true or false is less important than whether it is effective in practice.

Discourse is the plural of statement. It is group of statements which provide a language for talking about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Statements are the basic units of discursive formation, which systematically construct an object and are sets of symbols or signs to which the status of knowledge can be ascribed. It governs the way that a topic can meaningfully be talked about the reasoned about [e.g. hysteria, sexuality, homosexuality, Romantic love in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century]. Thus, discourses are systems of representation, the rules and practices that produce meaningful statements in different historical periods. They are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and relation between them. They are ways of more than thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern. ‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements (‘Truth and Power’: 1980). Discourses are thus ways of constructing knowledge about some topic: a formation of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. They define what is and is not appropriate in our formulation of, and our practices in relation to, a particular subject embody its characteristics. This refers to an approach in which meaning, representation, language; politics, institutions, society and culture are considered to be constitutive.

Discursive practices are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns of general behavior, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them. The study of discourses [of madness, punishment, sexuality or Romantic love, etc.] must include the following elements: statements about these topics and exclude others (rules of inclusion and exclusion); ‘subject’ who in some ways personify the discourse: the madman, the hysterical woman, the Romantic hero, etc.; how this knowledge about the topic acquires authority, a sense of embodying the ‘truth’ about it; practices within institutions for dealing with the subjects: medical treatments for the insane, punishment regimes for the guilty, ways of reading Romantic poetry, etc. This discourse is a way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a particular historical moment. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and use to regulate the conduct of others. It operates by rules of exclusion concerning what is prohibited. It is controlled in terms of objects (what can be spoken of), ritual (where and how one may speak), and the privileged or exclusive right to speak of certain subjects (who may speak). But discourses are not mere textual play. They have real effects in the ways of people using them come to understand themselves, others, and their world. They determine by a set of regulatory rules what

may possibly be said (and done) about a particular topic to be 'true', and silence by exclusion those concepts that are 'untrue'. These rules, which govern writing and thinking, and thereby acting in a particular field, differ from one period to other.

In every society the production of discourses is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. Discourse is a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance. Foucault continues his definition of discourse in terms of its effect. More than being merely a simple speech act, he interprets discursive practices as both verbal and non-verbal means of manipulating and defining the hierarchy of power within a society. They are both tools and weapons. In his view, all evidences of discourse must confess their pretense of feigned naiveté and innocence. When discourse is effective, organizing and regulating relations of power, it is a 'regime of truth'. The dominant discourse helps to define the boundaries of common sense in which the preferred positions in debates are defined as self-evident truths, and other perspectives and positions are dismissed as irrelevant, inappropriate, or without substance. It is often the dominant discourse which pre-formulates many of the everyday ideological beliefs that have become widespread in racist, caste-ridden, patriarchal or capitalist societies. A dominant discourse has the power to interpret major social, political and economic issues and events. Dominant discourses, as implicated with power and institutions, silence those on the other side of truth, rationality, normality, universality and scientificity.

Discourses carry sets of social meanings that are politicized. They play a critical role in shaping the issues as well as in identifying the boundaries of 'legitimate' discourse. Opponents can be marginalized as 'illegitimate', 'irregular', 'deviant', 'criminal', 'aberrant', 'anti-social', 'delinquent', and 'offending'. Our notions of truth and falsity are produced by disciplines (medicine, psychiatry, economics, literary theory, etc.) However, the truth claims of disciplines, which history shows to be discontinuous, are not as interesting to Foucault as the 'means' by which they are inscribed. He claims that "The history which bears and determines us has the form of war rather than that of language: relations of power, not relations of meaning". Hence his insightful theorizing of the densely intersticed, implicated, interwoven, and enwrapped relations between 'truth' and 'power'. In 'Truth and Power', Foucault describes his genealogical analysis of the subject as, of form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, and domains of objects. In the West, truth is produced and controlled by a few political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media). The capacity to determine truths affords as institution enormous power.

One important instance of discourse is 'Orientalism' to the study of which E. Said made significant contribution. Said writes, "I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in the *Archeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism". Said's contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period. Moreover, so authoritatively a position did Orientalism have that no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism. Because of Orientalism the Orient was not said is not free subject of thought or action. It is true that Orientalism does not unilaterally determine what can be said about the Orient, but it is the whole network of interest inevitably brought to bear on and therefore always involved in any occasion when that peculiar entity the Orient is in question. Said's book *Orientalism* tries to demonstrate how does this happen. It also tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self (Said: 1995(b)).

### **Knowledge as power**

Foucault's work investigates the relationship between power and knowledge. He does not, however, detect, as Gordon pointed out, false or spurious knowledge but rather those which are valued and effective because of their reliable instrumental efficacy. Moreover, Foucault often uses the French word *savoir* a term for knowledge with connotation of 'know-how' (a way to make a



problem tractable or a material manageable), for this middle sort of knowledges, which may fall short of rigorous scientificity but command some degree of ratification within a social group and confer some recognized instrumental benefit. The reason the combining of power and knowledge is a redoubtable thing is not that power promotes spurious knowledges but, rather, that the rational exercise of power tends to make the fullest use of knowledges capable of the maximum instrumental efficacy. It is dangerous because the knowledge that guides or instrumentalizes the exercise of power is valid and scientific ('Introduction': 2001 (a): p x viii-xix). Foucault, however, cautioned that he never said that knowledge and power were identical, that knowledge merged with power or knowledge was power, or that knowledge was not more than a mask over the structures of domination. If they were identical, why should he at all study their relationship? In 'Prison Talk', he said: "What has been studied even less is the relation between power and knowledge, the articulation of each on the other. It has been a tradition for humanism to assume that once someone gains power... shut up in... their room, their meditations, only they can discover the truth. Now I have been trying to make visible the constant articulation I think there is of power on knowledge and of knowledge on power. We should not be content to say that power has a need for such- and- such a discovery, such- and- such a form of knowledge, but we should add that the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information. One can understand nothing about economic science if one does not know how power and economic power are exercised in everyday life. The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (1980). He made it clear that the university hierarchy is only the most visible and least dangerous form of the effects of power linked to knowledge while the diffused, entrenched and dangerous ones operate in other places.

He said, "What I set out to show was how certain forms of power that were of the same type could give rise to bodies of knowledge that were extremely different both in their object and in their structure. Let's take the problem of the structure of the hospital: it gave rise to confinement of a psychiatric type, to which corresponded the formation of a body of psychiatric knowledge whose epistemological structure may leave one fairly skeptical. But in another book (*The Birth of the Clinic*- first published in 1963-PB)... I tried to show how, in the same hospital structure, there developed a body of anatomo- pathological knowledge that was the foundation of a medicine possessing a quite different potential for scientific development. We have, then, power structures, fairly closely related institutional forms- psychiatric confinement, medicinal hospitalization- that are bound up with different forms of knowledge, between which it is possible to draw up a system of relations based not on cause and effect, still less on identity, but on conditions" ('The Concern for Truth': 1988(a). He further said, "Indeed, truth is no doubt a form of power. And is saying that, I am only taking up one of the fundamental problems of Western philosophy when it poses these questions: Why, in fact, are we attached to truth? Why the truth rather than lies? Why the truth rather than myth? Why the truth rather than illusion? And, I think that, instead of trying to find out what truth, as opposed to error, is, it might be more interesting to take up problem... how is it that, in our societies, 'the truth' has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall?" ('On Power': 1988(a). Modern humanism is mistaken in drawing the line between knowledge and power for they are integrated with one another. "It is not possible to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. 'Liberate scientific research from the demands of monopoly capitalism': maybe it's a good slogan, but it will never be more than a slogan" (1980: p 52). For, 'truth, (that is, what functions as truth or is taken as truth in a given historical situation) is produced by the operations of power: power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another (1987). Application and effectiveness of power/ knowledge was more important than the question of its 'truth'. Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense 'becomes true'. 'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produces and sustains it, and to effects of power which induces and which extend it. It is a 'regime' of truth, not merely ideological or superstructural; it was condition of the formation and development of capitalism ('Truth and Power': 1980).

In 'Questions on Geography', Foucault said, "Once knowledge can be analyzed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relation of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory" (1980). As he suggests, we should admit power produces knowledge, that it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produce a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant of power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, which determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. Here power is not entirely negative, a possession of the privileged, restricting and constraining the have-nots; rather power is an effect, produce in and through the production of particular forms and domains of knowledge. Neither is knowledge wholly positive, bringing progress, liberation and freedom from the repressive power imposed by a certain class, group, sex or colour upon and *other*. In *The History of Sexuality*, he claims that truth is not by nature free, nor error servile, but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power and he speaks of the positive mechanisms that produce knowledge and generate power. It is a political process that determines what domains and form of knowledge (what foundational categories and separations) will prevail and become dominant within a social or cultural group. Hegemonic ideologies, conceptions of Knowledge and Reality/ Truth, ways of thinking about the world, are the results of political processes in which meanings/ separations (linguistic/cognitive) contend for control. The dominant forms of knowledge within a society are determined in and through power relations, which are an effects of knowledge production. Power is the condition for knowledge. Power produces the spaces within which it becomes possible to know and articulate our knowledge.

Foucault did not deny the existence of classes, but was opposed to class reductionism and focused to how power operated within an institutional apparatus which is always inscribed in a play of power, but it is always linked to certain co-ordinates of knowledge. The apparatus of punishment included many elements: discourses, institutions, regulations, laws, architectural arrangements, laws, administrative measures, moralities etc. So this is what the apparatus consists in: 'strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by types of knowledges'. All political and social forms of thought are inevitably caught up in interplay of knowledge and power. Knowledge and power interpenetrate in certain types of practices, such as the regulation of the body, governing bodies, and the formation of the self. Thus, it asks how people govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge. Foucault pays particular attention to the techniques that are developed from knowledge and to how they are used to control people. "The important thing here...is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves... it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power". Truth is a thing of this world ("Truth and Power":1980:p131). This means, according to Gordon, that truth exist or is given and recognized only in worldly forms, through actual experiences and modes of verification. It further means that truth is a serious matter and a serious force in our world and that there is work for us to do in investigating the presence and effects of truth in the history of our societies ('Introduction':2001(a): p x viii).

This is interesting to note that for Foucault, power is a "more- or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinate cluster of relation". It is characteristic of all relationships and, in fact, constitutes those relationships. All individuals exercise power, and are all subjected to it. Power increasingly does not function as a center and is deployed and exercised more and more through a net- like organization in modern Western society taking the form of capillaries of power. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. This suggests that we are all caught up in the circulation of power relation: oppressors and oppressed. Moreover, power is not only negative; it is also *productive* network which runs through the whole social body because it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, and produces discourses: "Power produces; it produces reality, it produce domains of objects and ritual of truth". The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. Power operates as a creative force that facilitates, produces and increases qualities

and conditions. It “traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourses”.

Discourse is enmeshed with power, but it is not necessary to find a ‘subject’ like the king, the ruling class the state for power/ knowledge to operate. Foucault was critical of the traditional conception of the subject (an individual, the core of the self, as the independent authentic sources of action and meaning). The ‘subject’ is produced within discourse. That is, the subject cannot be outside discourse because it must be subjected to discourse and also exists within the knowledge (which is produced by discourse), the discursive formation of a particular period and culture. The subject is a ‘discursive effect’, that is, they are the product of many intersecting discourses of truth, power, knowledge and ethics. His historical researches consider concepts like madness, criminality, sexuality, and how they have been used and constituted in particular periods (generally Europe from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, though his later books concentrate on Greek and Roman antiquity) and particular disciplines or thematic fields (psychiatry, medicine, linguistics, penal practice, sexual conduct) to articulate systems of thought about human beings and the way human identity is constituted and codified.

### **Concluding remarks**

Given the repeated overemphasis on discourse and power/knowledge in the writings of Foucault, there is a tendency among commentators to show that Foucault’s views on power and the language of truth lead to the implication that there is no ‘natural truth/ physical reality’ out way we can know it outside discourse. Even if there is no way to know this outside discourse, how do we know at all that there is any? Any knowledge without being mediated through discourse and power is unattainable for mankind. Any knowledge is possible only historically. At this point, however, we can ask, if one admits the unmistakably powerful presence and perceptible functions of discourses of society, of course, in a specific historical context, does not one simultaneously imply an admission of a kind of non- discursive presence of the discourses themselves? *Non- discursive presence* of something is philosophically already presumed. The problem is that if ‘physical truth/natural reality’ is absolutely denied, that amounts to a kind of discourses, essentialism or in other words, power-essentialism. The social-natural reality becomes simply a derivative of power and discourse. On the contrary, I would like to consider ‘physical reality’ and ‘discourse’ as constituents of an over determined totality (in the Althusserian sense), in which both are mutually constitutive, and one is the condition for the possibility as well as existence of the other. Discourses are impossible to emerge unless there is some kind of natural reality out of which and as a part of which only they can exist. Physical reality in its turn can be perceived and conceptualized, constructed, constituted and known only historically, by and through discourses.

My reading is that: *Foucault never quite denied that there is a physical or natural reality, a truth, but it is always perceived and has to be perceived historically and through social practices, as a mediated, through discourses and effects of power.* But it remains for him to philosophically prove such a reality or truth assumed to have existed in some non-discursive or pre-discursive space that might have escaped the mediation by discourses, regimes or truth and power, maybe perceived intuitively, or directly present in consciousness, in the phenomenological sense. Using Derridean Deconstruction we may seek to explore in the margins of Foucault’s works whether there is an admission of any ‘physical reality/ natural truth’ and thus construct his position on this question. There are a few instances in *Madness and Civilization; Birth of the Clinic; Archeology of Knowledge; Discipline and Punish; Power/ Knowledge; Power; Politics Philosophy Culture*; etc.; we can trace his passing and occasional remarks about the natural, physical and scientific realities. For instance, he said, “... there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge” (1980). He further said “... there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised...” (ibid). Even later, in the face of allegations of ‘naturalism’ against him for not being able to adequately explain the inevitability of resistances, he sticks to this position. This apart, when asked if his analysis of the relations between power and knowledge concerns the exact sciences (i.e. natural sciences like physics, chemistry, etc.) also (along with the human sciences), he said, “Oh no, not at all! I would not make such a claim for myself. And,

anyway, you know, I'm an empiricist: I don't try to advance things without seeing whether they are applicable" ('On Power':1988(a). Of course, he hastened to add that the development of chemistry can be understood along with the development of industrial needs; also, that science in Europe has become institutionalized as a power through a university system, laboratories and experiments. Gordon observed: "Foucault's project was interested in the role of knowledges as useful and necessary to the exercise of power because they were practically serviceable, not because they were false... Foucault convincingly disavows any general intentions through his analyses of discrediting or invalidating science in general, or any specific science: the implication of psychiatry, for example, in institutions and practices of power 'in no way impugns the scientific validity or the therapeutic effectiveness of psychiatry; it does not endorse psychiatry, but neither does it invalidate it'... From time to time,... Foucault found it necessary to disavow any direct attempt through his work to refute or discredit currently existing forms of knowledge or disciplines such as psychiatry or criminology, whose historical origins are touched on in *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*" ('Introduction': 2001(a): p xvi-xviii; Foucault's comment cited by Gordon from "The Ethics of the Concern for Self "). But then, many of his assertions that overstress discourse as the language of truth and power, and the implication of power/ knowledge will need modification.

Whatever be the inadequacies in his explanation of resistance, Foucault no doubt unequivocally celebrate resistance. The problem is that if every resistance is mediated, perceived, informed, produced and becomes meaningful through discourses and power, what happens to the ethico-political of resistance, or in other words, what about any underlying moral assumption that might induce a meaningful political action? If economic interest of the workers and peasants against global capital, suffering of the peoples of the post-colonial third world and resistances based on questions of gender, caste, race, colour, environment etc. become meaningful only within this or that discursive framework, on what moral grounds does Foucault celebrate the marginalized and the subjugated? A possible answer may be this: any group that perceives oppression and suffering as meditated through particular discourse/s starts social action and seeks to broadbase its resistance by appealing to those who share the same perceptions, maybe as produced by similar discursive positions. But then, the possibility of united struggle on a material social basis, such as class or colonial bondage becomes undermined. It remains for social researchers to see if material basis for social action should prevail over a common discursive sharing, or *vice versa* as a possible strategic ground for any socially meaningful and politically relevant collective action such as resistance?

Finally, in today's specific historical context, there is sufficient empirical evidence of the nature which Foucault often valued that people of different societies and cultures share common experiences of suffering both physical and of thought and passions, as well as resistance, which are obviously produced by common effects of global network of power and meditated, constructed and informed by a common anti- global capital discourse fast emerging all over the world. This is evident through world- wide WSF and other popular protests launched against Globalization and WTO, Group of 8, US aggression on Afghanistan and Iraq, Environmental Pollution, etc. Although most of Foucault's writings are preoccupied with concern for resistance on a local level, I believe it is still possible to apply his concepts in the context of the effects of global power and discourse of networking in resistance movements on a global scale. In 'Power and Strategies', Foucault said, "It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it,... but this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable forms of domination... there are no relations of power without resistances...It (resistance of power) exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, *like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies*" (emphasis mine- PB) (1980). Keeping this in mind, is there any possibility of a potential ethico-politics based on strategic intersubjectivity? One may perhaps think of such intersubjectivity but again that has to be partly based on some 'natural/real' strategic grounding as we discussed above and some common discursive perception that is emerging. In both cases, however, some of Foucault's extreme positions on discourse as the language of truth and power will need rethinking.

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