By embedding the critique of capitalist "colonization" within the broader framework of reason and communicative activity, Habermas escapes the dilemma that he found in Horkheimer and Adorno. In essence, Habermas tries to provide a unity of the is and the ought *before* the revolution, as a presupposition not only of the revolution but of all attempts to co-opt that revolution, in order to avoid the trap of demonic totalization described by Horkheimer and Adorno. Habermas's strategy, then, not only aims at unity but also presupposes it. Further, because of that presupposition, Habermas avoids any weaknesses that might attend a transcendental account of communicative action by offering his own analysis as historically bound by the linguistic parameters of his culture.

It is, however, the very presuppositions of the possibility of such a philosophy that create trouble for Habermas. On the surface, his analysis appears to abandon the strategic level in favor of the formal level; he is analyzing a contextual reality that provides the resources for resistance, analogous to the way Althusser argues that historical forces provide the basis for the transition to communism. However, Habermas's claim is only that in our historical situation rationality is so constituted that it *presupposes* the ideal speech situation.[32] Nowhere does Habermas argue that the ideal speech situation is ever achieved, and seemingly he feels no need to, holding that the ideal speech situation serves as a motivator even when unachieved or unachievable. In fact, he seems precluded from arguing that it could ever be achieved. To claim that it had been in a specific instance would lay one open to the challenge of how one knew that to be the case, and answering that challenge involves the presumption that one can tell the difference between ideal and distorted speech, which would lead to an infinite regress. But then, if the ideal speech situation is never achieved but only presupposed, how can Habermas's analysis of communicative action allow for anything more than an empty possibility of escaping the capitalist

---

[32] See Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1:386.

The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism

Todd May

1994

in order to motivate communication: it merely has to serve as its ideal goal. Habermas argues that rational discourse does not comprise a single type, but rather five different types, each with its own structure and set of validity claims: theoretical discourse, practical discourse, aesthetic criticism, therapeutic critique, and explicative discourse.[30] The assumption within each type of discourse is that its validity claims can be redeemed, at least to a degree (otherwise, why communicate?); thus an ideal speech situation is the goal of the communicative activity inherent in each.

These five types of rational discourse constitute part of the "lifeworld" within which we conduct our daily activity. However, that lifeworld is not left untouched or unaffected by the practices of advanced capitalism. Capitalism attempts to "colonize" the lifeworld with its own structures of calculative rationality, profit motive, individualism, and reification. This colonization distorts the various discourses of rationality, turning them into "strategic" rather than "communicative" discourses and thus blunting their possibility for independent assessment and critique (and subsequently, at times, for political intervention based upon the results of that critique). Thus, the initial requirement of a liberatory politics is the reassertion of communicative activity from various sites in the lifeworld. This is what Habermas holds is going on in the various struggles around feminism, environmentalism, and other resistance movements that speak in voices other than those of bourgeois capitalism.[31]

---

[30] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action.* 1:23. Habermas gives a more detailed defense of his five categories, relating them to Anglo-American speech act theory, in his set of "Intermediate Reflections" (1:273–338).

[31] The analysis of lifeworld and its colonization is treated in Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative* Action, Vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), particularly in the "Intermediate Reflections" on pp. 153–97

second role, then it would be subject to the same marginalization that Horkheimer and Adorno had already analyzed (and, in another way, inhabited). In other words, the resistance still had to be a reason, a reason that could account for itself. It was not required of this reason, however, that it be transcendental or ahistorical. It did not have to be able to ground itself for all time or to present a critique valid for all forms of society. Rather, it had to be relevant and self-grounding only within the current context of advanced capitalist culture.

Habermas's choice for this reason was the linguistic structure of communicative action. What communicative action introduces into linguistic practice is the possibility of communication free from the distortions of bourgeois culture and thus capable of providing a resource for critique of that culture that is both within the context of reason and not already co-opted by the object of critique. As Habermas sees it, the decline of traditional culture and its myths brought about the possibility of a discourse free from traditional taboos: that is, the possibility of unfettered rational consensus. The prospect of rational consensus presupposes an "ideal speech situation" in which consensus has been reached.[29] This presupposition does not have to be capable of realization

---

[29] Habermas gives an explication of this much-misunderstood term in *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press. 1975), pp. 107–8. where he says that the ideal speech situation presupposes four components: 1) unrestricted discussion of bracketed claims (i.e., the claims in question); 2) focus only upon the claims bracketed for the purpose of discussion; 3) lack of any threat of force or coercion; and 4) setting aside of all motivations except the search for truth (or, more broadly, for the validity proper to the type of discourse). It should be noted, and will be discussed below, that Habermas does not argue that in reality an ideal speech situation can be achieved. Although he does not use the term in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, it is presupposed in his analysis: e.g., "The rationality inherent in [communicativel practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based in *the end* on reasons" (1:17). Habermas here must assume that the presupposition of communicative activity is an ideal speech situation, without which he would have no ground to refer to its rationality.

Contents

preted via the guiding idea of a universal reconcilia-
tion… On the other hand, Horkheimer and Adorno can
only suggest this concept of truth; for if they wanted to
explicate those determinations that, in their view, can-
not inhere in instrumental reasons, they would have
to rely on a reason that is before reason.[27]

However, rather than wondering whether this dilemma cast
doubt upon the strategic model that is the foundation of Marxism,
Habermas instead chose to alter the material with which the
structure was erected. For him, "the program of early critical
theory foundered not on this or that contingent circumstance,
but from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of
consciousness."[28] What was required was not an abandonment of
the strategic model, but a recasting of it in terms of the linguistic
rather than the subjective.

Political subjects are always capable of co-optation. The fact of
cooptation, even universal co-optation, does not, however, imply
that all resources for resistance are blocked. What needs to be in-
vestigated is neither the subjects nor the empirical constitution of
their experience, but the structure of human activity. It is only
at that level that one can tell whether and where the instruments
of resistance are to be discovered. Keeping within philosophical
tradition (as well as the tradition of Critical Theory), Habermas
chose reason as the human activity whose structure required in-
vestigation. Was it possible, he asked, to find within the structure
of reason a means of resistance to co-optation?

Such a means would have to include two crucial aspects. First, it
must escape the co-optation of bourgeois reason. Second, it must
be capable of grounding itself rationally. If it could not fulfill the

---

[27] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action.* Vol. 1: Reason
and the Rationalization *of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon
Press, 1984), p. 382.
[28] Ibid., p. 386.

tion. The Critical Theorists, to varying degrees, saw the capitalist project as victorious; there is no outside to capitalism, or at least no effective outside. (This deep pessimism was not shared by all Critical Theorists. Herbert Marcuse, for example, was not so despairing; but he did share the view, which he articulated in *One-Dimensional Man*,[26] that the contemporary system of alienated socialization is pervasive.) For most Critical Theorists, the one space left open for resistance was that of art, which was less a threat to the system than an isolated act of refusal. Art constitutes the ethical pole of a strategic thought that constructs its philosophy in the face of a demonic capitalist totalization.

This dead end was not adventitious. The project of Critical Theory was to analyze a failure: namely, the failure of the working class to embrace the Marxist perspective. However, the only resources the Critical Theorists allowed themselves were those available through the strategic political philosophy of Marxism: one struggle, one theory, one vanguard. Even without the assumption of the vanguard (although as intellectuals who considered themselves well placed to survey the whole failure of Marxism, the Critical Theorists seem to occupy a position analogous to the vanguard), the destiny of their analysis was to be a despairing one. They left themselves no resources with which to reconstitute the possibility of resistance. The one struggle was not in sight because the one class capable of it had been co-opted. Class polarization had not been overcome; instead, it had become so profoundly mystified that it was impossible to liberate it as an insight capable of revolutionary motivation. Finally, the very possibility of a revolutionary thought had escaped, because mathematical rationality had come to encompass all of reason. It was this last point that Habermas saw so clearly:

> On the one hand, this reflection [*Dialectic of Enlightenment*] suggests a concept of truth that can be inter-

---

[26] Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

Dedication

For Kathleen, David, and Rachel

Preface

This book began as a conversation on a train headed from Pittsburgh to Washington to attend the Eastern Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association. I was trying to explain to a friend, Mark Lance, what the political theory of poststructuralism was all about. He listened more patiently than he should have and then said, "It sounds like anarchism to me." That comment was the seed of an article, "Is Post-Structuralist Political Theory Anarchist?"—which appeared in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* in 1989—and eventually of the present work.

I believe that people familiar with feminist theory will discover that much of the perspective developed here has resonances with feminism, and some may wonder why I have not discussed those resonances in the text. The explanation is simple, having to do with the limitations of my own expertise. It would take a grasp broader than my own to do justice to both feminism and poststructuralism at the same time. I must, therefore, leave that task to someone else.

I would like to thank Mark Poster and Thomas Dumm for careful readings and thoughtful suggestions regarding the text. Nancy Love's encouragement helped get the project going. Sandy Thatcher, Kate Capps, and Cherene Holland at Penn State Press are a joy to work with. Chuck Purrenhage has once again protected the English language from my onslaughts. And Mark Lance has, over the years, provided me with intellectual riches far exceeding my ability to put them to good use.

of capitalism, reaches everyone in the form of movies, television, newspapers, and so on. Thus, the myth of the Enlightenment is transmitted without cessation to all who have even the most remote contact with contemporary society. Every resistance is effectively stifled: not by being suppressed, but by being rendered yet another spectacle in the parade of culture. Resistance that cannot be appropriated is merely left outside the system, a testament to its own absurdity. The ultimate aim of the culture industry is to provide pleasure, but a pleasure that is "not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance."[25]

The picture is a bleak one. With it, Marxist thought appears to be in a space very unlike that of the strategic calculations of Leninism. However, from Lenin to Horkheimer and Adorno, the underpinnings of thought remain the same. For both, there is a single enemy: capitalism. While Lenin saw capitalism primarily in economic terms, the turn to "cultural capitalism" by the Critical Theorists does not change the analysis of capitalism; it merely spreads it across the entire social space. In that sense, Critical Theory radicalizes Lenin's thought. Rather than seeing the economic sphere as determinative *for* social relationships, Critical Theory views the economic sphere as the model of social relationships. For Critical Theory, there is no distinction to be made between the relevant and the irrelevant; everything is relevant, because it is all part of the same system. While for the Lenin of "What Is to Be Done?" the danger of the enemy that promoted bourgeois thought was local and identifiable, for the Critical Theorists it is pervasive and without recognizable perpetrators.

Radicalization of the Leninist analysis, however, did change the prognosis for possible political action. In effect, positive intervention was rendered impossible: all resistance was capable either of recuperation within the parameters of capitalism or marginaliza-

---

[25] Ibid., p. 144.

is—"a pretence"[20]—and that, through the revolution, will reinstate totality: a world where things have their place in a unified whole rather than appearing in the disparateness of the commodity form. Essence will unite with appearance, and with that what ought to be will become what is.

Whether such a unification could occur became increasingly doubtful within the thought of the Critical Theorists;[21] however, the idea that capitalist culture had reified—indeed, mathematicized—everything became a centerpiece of their thought. In Dialectic *of Enlightenment*,[22] Horkheimer and Adorno trace the rise of the mathematical thinking of the Enlightenment as a return to the kind of mythical thinking that the Enlightenment was supposed to replace. This new myth overtakes all contemporary society in the name of rationality (reason = calculation) and justifies itself by proclaiming all that is outside of it irrational. Thus, "The spirit of enlightenment replaced the fire and the rack by the stigma it attached to all irrationality, because it led to corruption."[23] A new totalization is born, to which all must conform. The price for this new totalization is alienation: "Men pay for an increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power."[24] That alienation includes, of course, alienation from themselves.

How is this new totalization maintained? How do people allow themselves to be alienated so deeply? For Horkheimer and Adorno, the answer lies in "the culture industry." Bourgeois culture has become pervasive; its project, to subordinate everyone to the dictates

---

[20] Ibid, p. 101.

[21] Theodor Adorno's last major work, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), denied the possibility outright: "Having broken the pledge to be as one with reality or at the point of realization, philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself" (p. 3).

[22] New York: Seabury Press, 1972.

[23] Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* p. 31.

[24] Ibid., p. 9.

1. Introduction

Political philosophy, especially in the Continental tradition, is a project perpetually haunted by crisis. This is of necessity, because it inhabits that shifting space between what is and what ought to be. Unlike much of traditional ethics, on the one hand, and metaphysics on the other, which also inhabit that space, the work of political philosophy is dictated by the tension between the two, rather than by one of the poles. That is why Kant distinguishes ethics from justice, arguing that justice requires the balancing of a multiplicity of wills rather than merely the correct determination of the will.[1] On his view, the task of ethics is primarily to discuss what ought to be, as divorced from what is, and only later to ask how the ought applies to the is. That view remains with us, alive still in such disparate ethical projects as utilitarianism and theories of practical reasoning.[2] (I shall propose below a view of ethics

---

[1] "Justice is therefore the aggregate of those conditions under which the will of one person can be conjoined with the will of another in accordance with a universal law of freedom" (Kant, *The Metaphysical Elements of Justice,* trans. John Ladd [Indianapolis: Boobs-Merrill, 1965], p. 12). Kant, of course, tries to resolve this tension by positing the unity of freedom at a higher level. This attempted resolution does not, however, affect his recognition that there is a tension to be addressed between what is and what ought to be.

[2] For an example of the former. see J.C.C. Smart's "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics," in Smart and Bernard Williams's *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). For examples of the latter, see the Hobbesian theory of David Gauthier in Morals by *Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1986) and the more Kantian treatment of Stephen Darwall in *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

that rejects this kind of divorce of the ought from the is.)[3] Alternatively, metaphysics focuses on the pole of what is; its project is to describe our world. But metaphysics is not entirely separable from considerations that may broadly be called ethical: it partakes of the normativity inhabiting the epistemology that provides its foundation.

Political philosophy, however, has only discussed the ought *given what is.* As the social configuration shifts, so must the philosophical approach.

"Philosophy," wrote Theodor Adorno, "which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed."[4] The obsolescence Adorno refers to is that predicted by Marx after the communist revolution, an obsolescence that was to overtake philosophy only by its realization—the unity between its concrete existence and its goal. What Adorno sees correctly here, cast in Hegelian terms, is that without the discordance between the world as it exists and the world as it is envisioned (and, for Marxism, to envision the world is always to draw its possibilities from its existence), there is no need for (political) philosophy. Political philosophy is precisely the articulation of that discordance.

It is fitting, and perhaps even welcome, then, that political philosophy is now in crisis. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has reshaped the terrain so that the foundation of existence upon which was built much of the vision of what could be has also collapsed. This is the meaning of the slogan that Marxism is dead. It is not that Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union offered a model for political change. That idea was

_____

[3] See Chapter 6, below. The view proposed in that chapter is not the only way for ethics to bind the ought with the is. Naturalist theories do so as well, though in a very different way. See, for example, Richard Brandt, A Theory *of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) and Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review,* vol. 95, no. 2 (1986): 163–207.

[4] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 3.

Discussions of what has prevented the anticipated revolution from occurring were hardly inaugurated by the Critical Theorists. Gramsci's analysis of hegemony[16] and Lukács's writings on reification and commodification[17] are theories of bourgeois dominance and routes to worker liberation. Lukács's work especially proved valuable for the Critical Theorists.[18] In his celebrated essay, Lukács argued that what characterizes current capitalism is that everything, including the worker, appears cast in the form of a commodity—an isolated, exchangeable object with no relation to any sources in the social world: "The atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the 'natural laws' of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society."[19] In this "reified" world, the truth of things appears to be grasped through mathematics rather than through understanding the place of those things in the social whole. Rational calculation rather than dialectical totalization (seeing the interwoven social relationships behind the manifestation of things) becomes predominant. It is not the case, however, that everything in fact is reified. Rather, it is only that things *appear* so because of the capitalist way of looking at them. It is the proletariat that, because of its experience of undergoing this quantification, is peculiarly well suited to become conscious of reification. The proletariat constitutes the historical force that will recognize the ideology of reification for what it

_____

[16] See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* trans, and ed Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971). esp pp. 242–64.

[17] See especially Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (1922), in *History and Class Consciousness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

[18] Martin Jay, in his history of Critical Theory, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1971), wrote that "*History and Class Consciousness,* whatever its author may have thought of it later, was a seminal work for them [the Critical Theorists], as [Walter] Benjamin, for one, was to admit" (p. 174).

[19] Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," pp. 91–92.

as possible to arrive at the proper conclusions through its own dialectical movement: "Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee."[14]

Worker spontaneity did not, historically, live up to the faith Luxemburg placed in it—in part, perhaps, because she mistakenly assumed increasing class polarization. Laclau and Mouffe trace the problem to a tension between her investment in spontaneism and her assumption of a working-class identity that precedes all practical activity.[15] In any case, events have borne out Luxemburg regarding the problem of discipline. (Her critique here has close parallels with Foucault's remarks cited in the preceding chapter.) The problem of allowing worker interest to be defined outside the experience of the workers by a vanguard that eventually becomes a ruling class is the legacy of Leninism in the Soviet Union. However, its fundamental assumption—that there is a distinction between working-class wants and interests—is not confined to Soviet Marxism.

What Soviet Marxists and Western Marxists have shared is the idea that the working class is, in its essence, revolutionary. The problem for both has been how to deal with the fact that its appearance seems to conflict with its essence. For the Soviets, that problem was dealt with "from above," by legislation and policing. For Western Marxists, who have not found themselves in positions of power, it has been dealt with "from below." The crucial question for them does not have to do with how to define workers as revolutionary, but with why they have not defined themselves as such. The most trenchant analyses of this contradiction between essence and appearance, which prevents the realization of a unity between what is and what ought to be, have been offered by the Critical Theorists, especially Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

_____

[14] Ibid, p. 108.
[15] *Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 11–12.

abandoned by all but the most obdurate many years ago. Rather, until recently, the discourse of Marxism still seemed to provide enough hope and enough sense to political philosophy that its shortcomings—both in theory and in reality—appeared reparable. However, the rejection by its subjects of the entire spectrum of Marxist thought and intervention laid waste to that appearance.

This does not mean, of course, that as political *philosophy* capitalism is triumphant. We have not entered the end of political philosophy or, as some have argued, the end of history with capitalism providing its final unity.[5] It would take more insularity to pronounce the end of the tension between the world as it exists and the world as it could be or ought to be than even Western supporters of Soviet Marxism possessed after Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin. What is needed is not less political philosophy, not less critique, but more. And it has been not the least of historical Marxism's faults that its discourse suppressed that "more" for so many years.

The purpose of this essay is to sketch the framework of an alternative political philosophy, one that differs from its dominant predecessors, especially free-market liberalism and Marxism, not only in the vision it provides but also in the level and style of intervention it advocates. The framework is drawn from a tradition of political philosophy that is current but has not yet received attention precisely as a *framework,* namely, French poststructuralist thought. In this framework I include, for reasons that will become clear, the writings primarily of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

Poststructuralist political thought has offered, though not precisely in these terms, an alternative vision of political intervention that articulates the tension between the world as it is and the

_____

[5] Much of the recent debate about whether history has come to an end was sparked by Francis Fukuyama's The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3–18.

world as it could be, particularly since the collapse of the Marxist project. That the framework it provides has not been much discussed as such is in part owing to its nature: it avoids global discourse in favor of concrete, limited analyses. In poststructuralism, macropolitics gives way to micropolitics. It might seem at first glance, then, that the attempt to situate those analyses within a more general philosophical framework would constitute a betrayal of the poststructuralist project. Later we will see how, by grafting poststructuralism onto a tradition in whose light it has not been grasped—the anarchist tradition—it is possible to articulate a poststructuralist framework without betraying its fundamental micropolitical commitments. However, it is necessary first to understand the political register upon which poststructuralist theory operates.

Distinctions can be drawn among three different types of political philosophy: formal, strategic, and tactical. Formal political philosophy is characterized by its cleaving either to the pole of what ought to be or to the pole of what is at the expense of the tension between the two. This cleaving is a matter of degree: the more closely one pole dominates the philosophizing, the more formal it is. More formal political thought produces philosophical positions that differ in kind from those which are less formal. The question that drives formal political philosophy is: What would be the nature, or at least the important characteristics, of a just society? The most famous example of this type of philosophy is John Rawls's A *Theory of Justice*.[6] By utilizing the maximin principle of decision theory in a situation (the original position) of ignorance about one's eventual place in a just society, Rawls tries to provide the principles all rational beings would choose as the cornerstone of their society. The principles he derives, the principles of liberty and equal opportunity and the difference principle, characterize what he would call a "just society."

_____

[6] Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Thus, we need to distinguish between wants and interests. The for mer the proletariat cannot be mistaken about. The latter they can, and often are, mistaken about. Their experience of unhappiness is entirely justified; but its meaning and its solution must come from outside that experience.

The dividing line between legitimate wants and illusory interests is a diffuse one. On it, however, hangs the entire history of Western Marxism. Is the desire to be paid a decent wage and left alone a legitimate want or a combination of legitimate want and an illusory interest? If increasing immiseration does not occur under capitalism, and workers remain either content with their standard of living or not discontented enough to engage in the distasteful activity of politics, is this a legitimate want or an illusory interest? It seems that the dividing line between the two can be maintained clearly only in those instances in which workers are undeniably miserable and seek solutions in ways that are obviously inadequate. Otherwise, one requires another analysis that indicates why certain wants are legitimate and others are the product of an inadequate analysis. Lacking that analysis, one is in danger of merely legislating legitimate wants. Such legislation may be misleading in theory; in practice, it has proven disastrous.

Legislation of the dividing line between legitimate wants and illusory interests is the history of the Soviet Union. It was foreseen by Rosa Luxemburg when she accused Lenin of confusing two types of discipline: the spontaneous discipline of mass struggle and the authoritarian discipline that Lenin sought, and that she saw as a product of bourgeois thinking.[13] For Luxemburg, the imposition of discipline toward the goal of socialism at the expense of following the spontaneous wants and activity of the working class would, far from providing liberation for workers, repeat bourgeois society in its crucial features. One must trust worker spontaneity as much

_____

[13] Luxemburg, "Leninism or Marxism?" in *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961).

vanguard. The workers must be taught their true interests; they are mistaken about them. For "the history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness."[11]

It is crucial to understand what Lenin is arguing here. He does not claim that everything the workers want is mistaken. Such a claim would deny the validity of the entire proletarian experience. If that were to be denied, one wonders what the motive would be for revolution at all: there would be no unhappiness, or at least no legitimate unhappiness, to be overcome. Rather, what Lenin is arguing is that, on the basis of their experience, the workers develop legitimate desires that, in the end, cannot be realized by the routes they believe will realize them. In order to discover the proper route, they need a vanguard party to educate them about the true struggle and its theory. As Laclau and Mouffe put it:

> [T]he ontological privilege granted to the working class by Marxism was transferred from the social base to the political leadership of the mass movement. In the Leninist conception, the working class and its vanguard do not transform their class identity by fusing it with the multiple democratic demands that are politically recomposed by the hegemonic practices; instead, they regard these demands as stages, as necessary yet transitory steps in pursuit of their own class objectives. Under such conditions, the relations between 'vanguard' and 'masses' cannot but have a predominantly external and manipulative character.[12]

The method of Rawls's derivation of the principles—the decision made from behind a veil of ignorance—is what makes his philosophy a formal one. It is not, however, utopian. Rawls founds his philosophical procedure on the assumption that people are rationally self-interested beings.[7] Thus, he introduces a tension between what is and what ought to be, although his rendering of what is remains skeletal: restricted to an acknowledgment of rational self-interest rather than a full-blown description of our political situation. Nevertheless, even this skeletal rendering helps determine Rawls's program; without it, his most important contribution to the conception of a just society—the difference principle—would appear to be without moorings in his thought.

The difference between Rawls's work and Robert Nozick's An-archy, *State, and Utopia*[8] displays the difference between formal political philosophy and an ethical philosophy that forsakes all political elements. Nozick distinguishes his procedure from Rawls's by noting that what Rawls provides through the decision-theoretic structure are "end-state principles of justice," principles that determine, or at least delimit, the distributive structure of a society.[9] Nozick claims that such principles are unjust because they advocate taking away from people what, by their own efforts, rightfully belongs to them. He argues instead that justice must be conceived on the basis of process (or, as he calls it, "historical principles")[10] rather than end-state principles. Simply put, any property that is justly acquired and justly transferred ("justice" here being defined as the absence of coercion) is in accordance with all that can rea-

---

[11] Ibid., p. 74.

[12] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 56. The authors go on to note the connection between this conception of struggle and the introduction of military (as opposed to Marx's structural) terms in Leninist thought (p. 57).

---

[7] This is what renders suspect his claim, especially in chap. 40 of A *Theory of justice,* that he is providing an approach to justice that parallels Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics is based upon what we *ought* to do, regardless of our interests; Rawls's justice-as-fairness tempers the ethical claims by grounding them on a procedure designed specifically to deal with self-interest.

[8] New York: Basic Books, 1974.

[9] Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia, p.* 198.

[10] Ibid, p. 155.

sonably be asked. Just acquisition and transfer exhaust the concept of justice; to attach specific end-state distributive demands, such as the difference principle, is to introduce injustice.[11]

What distinguishes Nozick's characterization of justice from Rawls's, aside from the various merits that might accrue to each, is that the former is removed from any consideration of the way things actually are in the world. With Nozick, a philosophy of the just must be a prescription for a society that relies on no facts about the current composition of the world. Nozick describes how the world ought to be, and he gives hints about how to apply that ought to what is. Although he recognizes that many people are self-interested, this recognition plays no part in his thought. In fact, his principles of justice would work, by his lights, regardless of what people are actually like and what kind of world they live in. That is precisely the utopian element of his thought.

Formal political philosophy need not hew to the ought-pole, however. There are theoretical strands in Marxism that would see in the structure of a given social context the dominating pole of political philosophy. The mechanistic philosophy of the Second International would be exemplary here, as would some of the work of the evolutionary socialists (see Chapter 2, below). Of more significance are the early writings of Georg Lukács, who, though most of his influence was upon the strategic Marxism of the Critical Theorists, articulated a dialectical concept of social change that laid more emphasis on the historical necessity of the proletariat's coming to consciousness than on the contingency of a history that would require ethical considerations.[12] (It is worth noting here that historical contingency and taking seriously the ethical go hand in hand: if history is necessary, the responsibility of the individual to act correctly is negated, if not severely

_____
[11] For Nozick's argument here, see esp. ibid., pp. 151–52 and 178.
[12] See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971).

Lenin's argument for one theory is a direct reflection of the primacy of the class struggle. His reasoning is that, given this struggle, every theoretical proposal must be seen bivalently: either it helps the class struggle progress toward revolution or it helps the bourgeoisie forestall the possibility of revolution and thus maintain its domination. Evolutionary socialism, by diminishing the clarity of the polarization between the two classes, of their fundamentally irreconcilable interests, falls to the side of bourgeois ideology. For Lenin, it is not the bourgeois proposals of evolutionary socialism that cause it to be counterproductive to the revolutionary struggle. The problem is the converse. The reason it winds up making bourgeois proposals is that, by blunting the class analysis, it finds itself in the camp of the bourgeoisie. Its proposals derive from its strategic position; they do not define it.[9]

Lenin's third truth follows inevitably from the first two. If there is one struggle defined by one theory, then there can be only one leadership. That leadership must comprise a group of people who understand the theory and how to apply it: "*the role of the vanguard can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by an advanced theory.*"[10] The necessity for such a leadership, a vanguard, is implied by the ideological imperatives of the struggle. The need for revolution is not transparent to the workers. They have immediate interests, which the trade-union struggle addresses. These interests, which concern living and working conditions, can be met partially and in the short term by management concessions. However, they cannot ultimately be realized outside the context of the public ownership of the means of production. Any analysis that leads one to believe otherwise is a disservice to the workers, *even if they do not realize it.* And here is the crux of the Leninist theory of the

_____
[9] E.g.: "*all* subservience to the spontaneity of the mass movement and *any* degrading of Social-Democratic politics to trade union politics mean precisely preparing the ground for converting the labor movement into an instrument of bourgeois democracy" ("What Is to Be Done?" p. 125).
[10] Ibid., p. 70.

tion of workers' struggle to trade-union demands, "economism" in Lenin's terms, plays into the hands of the bourgeoisie by refusing to address the fundamental problem workers face: private ownership of the means of production. Thus trade unionism, in the end, is the accomplice of capitalism rather than socialism. On this analysis, there are no alternatives besides revolutionary communism and capitulation to capitalism: "[T]he only *choice is:* either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for humanity has not created a 'third' ideology, and moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology)."[7]

In his objections to evolutionary socialism, Lenin sets the agenda for twentieth-century Marxism. It is to be a strategic political intervention: that is, an intervention with a single goal, where deviation from that goal is either regression or betrayal. From the fact of there being just one progressive choice—"there is no middle course"—Lenin derives the three defining truths for Marxist politics: there can be only one struggle, there can be only one theory, there can be only one leadership. The requirement of one struggle is the legacy of Marx's analysis: if the core of oppression lies in the exploitation of the workers, then that exploitation must end in order for oppression to end. For Marx, regardless of what may be said about substructuresuperstructure interaction, there is something fundamental about economic relationships. That is why the class struggle is determinative for the structure of current society. It is not just one struggle among others.[8]

---

[7] Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" p. 82.

[8] The analysis of one struggle means that the workers must be completely victorious in the destruction of capitalism; all pockets of resistance must be eliminated. As Lenin says later in "The State and Revolution," "Those who recognize only the class struggle are not yet Marxists... A Marxist is one who extends the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the *dictatorship of the proletariat*" (p. 294).

diminished. Thus, a Marxism like Althusser's [which, as we shall see, emphasizes the contingency of history] falls to the strategic rather than the formal side of political philosophy. It takes ethics seriously, even if it seems to deny personal responsibility in its approach to social change.)

For Lukács, the reason that bourgeois society is able to reproduce itself successfully is that it turns everything—material objects, labor, time—into a commodity: exchangeable, isolated, calculable. People are alienated both from who they are and from what they produce. The proletariat, however, is in a position to overcome this alienation, because it—and it alone—can become conscious of this commodification, or "reification," as such: "[T]he bourgeoisie regularly transforms each new qualitative gain back on to the quantitative level... Whereas for the proletariat the 'same' development has a different class meaning: it means the abolition *of the isolated* individual, it means that workers can become conscious of the social character of labor."[13] As reification develops across capitalist society, then, the consciousness of the proletariat grows; eventually, it will overcome reification by overthrowing the capitalist order. This will usher in a new reign, the communist society, in which the ethical and the historical are united dialectically into a totality.[14] (The influence of Hegel on this aspect of Lukács's thought is palpable.)

Although Lukács gives precedence to the pole of what is, it should be noted that the ethical, though implicit, is not absent. It is clear that Lukács anticipates the arrival of the socialist society as a positive development. Anything that facilitates that arrival is to be embraced. Thus, the place of Lukács's own work is to be interpreted as a moment in the development of self-consciousness. His writing, like any event that promotes proletarian consciousness, is an ethical affair: it is not mere history. The ought-pole,

---

[13] Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness, p.* 171.

[14] Ibid., pp. 161–62.

then, though secondary to the movement of history, has a space marked out for it. It promotes the unfolding of the inevitable dialectic of the context toward a moment of positive ethical value.

The passage from formal to strategic political philosophy is a passage from reliance on one pole of political philosophy to an immersion into the tension between the two. Although this passage is fluid, the type of philosophy that falls more strictly under the category of the "strategic" differs qualitatively from that which we have characterized as formal. It centers its concern upon the question raised by that classic political strategist Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: "What is to be done?" In strategic political philosophy, ethical goals are not subservient to contextual understanding. Strategic political philosophy recognizes that history and social conditions unfold not of necessity but are mutable and perhaps even regressive at times. However, neither are history and social conditions secondary; they are consulted not merely to realize an ethical program but also to determine what concrete possibilities present themselves for intervention. In this sense, not only is the historical and social situation read in terms of ethical demands, but the ethical program is limited and perhaps partially determined by that situation. This is why much—though by no means all—political philosophy that falls under the category of the "strategic" addresses itself to the concrete historical conditions under which the philosophizing takes place.

We must be leery of calling this interaction between the pole and the ought-pole in strategic political philosophy a dialectic. There is no necessary higher synthesis achieved by their interplay. That is why the term "tension" seems more apt for characterizing their relationship. In the hands of Marxist strategists, however, the project is to treat this tension in a dialectical manner. Lenin, for instance, in arguing the need for the proletariat to seize the state apparatus in order to be able to wrest power from the ruling bourgeoisie, appealed to Marx's historical analysis of the events in 1848–51 in France, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,* trying to show that the bourgeoisie is capable of redistributing some of its power

latter to the former as a natural historical process," was made in the context of Marx's learning from the Paris Commune, the possibilities and dangers for socialism inherent in the current historical context.[4] For Lenin, all political work occurred in the disparity between what is and what ought to be, with the outcome always in doubt. It is for this reason that the theoretical struggle was so important: "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement."[5] History does not yield up its results as a matter of course; it must be appropriated if it is to be won, and it must be understood if it is to be appropriated.

The lessons of "What Is to Be Done?" provide the key to understanding Lenin's thought as a strategy. The purpose of this essay, written in 1905, is to provide the correct course for Russian Marxists in a time of theoretical doubt. Its context is the struggle between evolutionary socialism, whose leading proponent was the German Social Democrat Edward Bernstein, and the revolutionary socialism of Lenin. The fundamental tenet of the former is that society is naturally progressing toward a conjuncture of historical forces that requires of socialists only an effort at further social democratization.[6] Socialism was to be the heir to, not the antagonist of, bourgeois society. This tenet, denying Marx's prediction of increasing immiseration of the proletariat, and thus of increasing polarization and the necessity of revolution, lent itself to parliamentary forms of struggle and especially to an approval of the reformism of trade-union demands. Thus evolutionary socialism, if not formalist in its trust of what is, leans heavily on the is-pole in its political philosophy.

Lenin's objections to evolutionary socialism were both to its reformism and to the analysis behind that reformism. The limita-

---

[4] Lenin, The State and Revolution" (1917), in Essential Works *of Lenin* (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 306.

[5] Lenin, "What Is to Be Done?" (1905), in *Essential Works of Lenin,* p. 69.

[6] See Edward Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation,* trans. Edith Harvey (New York: Schocken Books, 1961).

Chantal Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.[1] There Laclau and Mouffe trace the increasing prominence of the Gramscian theme of hegemony—which they define as both a situation of antagonism and an instability of the contours and frontiers of that antagonism[2]—and they display it as a reaction to the failure of reductive analyses of social struggle. Although the lessons we shall draw from this history (lessons that affect which moments we have chosen as exemplary) diverge at points from those of Laclau and Mouffe, there is undoubtedly agreement between us regarding the general trend of twentieth-century Marxism.

In this discussion, we shall turn away from the significance of Marx's writings themselves. Questions of the status and import of Marx's writings are as notorious as they are important. Whether Marx was a historical determinist, what he meant by science, whether he was a formalist or a strategist, what relations he saw between base and superstructure: upon the answers to these intertwined questions hangs the viability of his work for contemporary political intervention. But these questions, and this viability, must forgo treatment here. They have been debated voluminously elsewhere. Our question, rather, takes us in the direction not of Marx's writings, but in that of their legacy in political philosophy. It is Marxism, rather than Marx, that we must address.[3]

If it is uncertain whether Marx was a formalist or a strategist, there can be no doubt that Lenin was a strategist. Even his remark in "The State and Revolution" that Marx "studied the *birth* of the new society *from* the old, the forms of transition from the

---

[1] Trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).
[2] See esp. p. 136.
[3] It is entirely possible that Marxism will die without ever having answered the question of whether there is a route from Marx's writings to a just society. With the demise of "actually existing socialism," Marx will likely be tossed into the Hegelian dustbin of history without a full hearing. A full hearing, however, is rarely given in history; Marx's fate will be determined less by what he said, and by what he meant by what he said, than by what others said he said. That is why his legacy is of more moment for our purposes than the exegesis of his writings.

in order to retain its political position in the final instance. He understands this necessity for seizure dialectically, however, arguing that a truly democratic state will mark the beginning of the end of statehood and its concentration of power: "Revolution alone can 'put an end' to the bourgeois state. The state in general, i.e. the most complete democracy, can only 'wither away.'"[15]

That strategic political philosophy does not require dialectical thinking is evidenced by Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince,* a discourse whose ethical call is "to free Italy from the hands of the barbarians."[16] By draw ing on evidence from various historical sources, but especially from Roman history, Machiavelli tries to show how a ruler can secure his land from internal and external threat; moreover, he argues that the time is ripe "for honoring a new prince and… conditions… potentially suited for a prudent and resourceful man to shape them so as to win honor for himself and well-being for her people."[17] To no one's surprise, he recommends Lorenzo de' Medici, the addressee of the text, as the person for the job. The Prince provides an example of nondialectical political philosophy that seeks to promote an ethical agenda within the context of a given political reality by means of answering the question "What is to be done?"

It may be objected that strategic political philosophy, as it is characterized here, falls not within the confines of philosophy at all, but rather along the register of political programs or agendas. After all, unlike Rawls or Nozick, we are not concerned here with the question "What is justice?" Instead, the answer to that question is somehow assumed; the project is only to show how best to promote the assumed justice, given historical and social constraints. It is worth recalling that alongside the question "What is justice?" po-

---

[15] Lenin, "The State and Revolution" (1917), in *Essential World of Lenin* (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 282.
[16] Machiavelli, The Prince *and* Selected *Discourses,* trans. Daniel Donno (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 87
[17] Ibid.

litical philosophy has, and explicitly so since the time of Aristotle, also dealt with the question "What kind of society should we try to create?"[18] That question does not exclude consideration of the circumstances—historical, political, social— in which the question is raised. Thus, considerations of justice need not be divorced from considerations of the circumstances in which the question arises. That is why, in addition to more clearly formal political thinkers like Hobbes or Locke, the tradition of political philosophy has included Aristotle, Marx, and Rousseau's *Discourses.*

Moreover, it is often through a recognition of the kinds of circumstances in which the question of justice is raised that the answers given to that question begin to make sense. It would be a misreading of Marx, for instance, to find in him a preconceived notion of justice which he applied to his current situation, found inadequately instantiated, and which then drove him to the conclusion that revolution was called for. All political philosophy—that is, all such philosophy that is not an a priori ethical reflection of the kind Nozick engages in—is irreducible to a mere application of ethical considerations to a current political field. Strategic political philosophy, like its formal counterpart, is articulated within the confines of what Rawls calls "reflective equilibrium," a situation in which "by going back and forth, sometimes altering the conditions of the contractual circumstances, at others withdrawing our judgements and conforming them to principle, I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgements duly pruned and adjusted."[19] To the rejoinder that Rawls here is speaking of a reflective process that

---

[18] "If all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good" (Politics 1.1.1252a. trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon [New York: Random House, 1941], p. 1127).

[19] Rawls, A *Theory of Justice, p.* 20.

2. The Failure of Marxism

What went wrong? It seems that there is no other question to be asked by Marxists. One hundred and twenty-five years after *Capital,* seventy-five years after the Russian Revolution, we have hardly come any closer to a society of equals under "actually existing socialism" than we have under capitalism; materially, we are no more advanced. There are many ways to ask why the Marxist project failed, and why it shows no signs of overcoming that failure. The way we shall ask is in accord with political philosophy. Why does there remain a discordance between the Marxist analysis of what is and what ought to be? Why does the tension between the contextual and the ethical, which was supposed to be overcome in the unfolding of history, stand as stark refutation of the Marxist project? Why, as Adorno would have it, does there still need to be philosophy?

In order to address this question, we must follow several major threads of Western Marxism: Leninism, Critical Theory, structuralist Marxism, the Italian *autonomia* movement, and the essays of Cornelius Castoriadis. These threads do not, of course, cover the whole cloth of Marxism. However, the point here is not to engage in a historical summary of Marxism as much as in an understanding of why it unfolded in the way that it did. What the discussion of this chapter attempts to show is that Marxism, in dealing with successive disappointments, kept reformulating itself in ways that edged ever closer to—but never entirely coincided with—the perspective embraced by anarchism. This discussion can be seen as complementary to, though not coincident with, the historical review of Marxism constructed by Ernesto Laclau and

and that all which remains is to see how best to make the world conform to that answer. A first reply to this query has already been given: any approach to the question of justice assumes certain ethical commitments, even if they are not as fullblooded as those in the political orientation that provides the context for this essay. However, a more substantial reply would be to try to show that the ethical commitments implicit in this orientation are themselves plausible. Although a thoroughgoing treatment of such commitments is beyond the scope of this essay, in the final chapter I will try to defend the ethical plausibility of the political analyses and philosophy of the poststructuralists. Such a defense will not only involve laying out certain ethical positions; once seen, they may prove to be fairly uncontroversial. Of more importance—and of more moment, because the poststructuralists have always avoided overt discussion of ethics—is a picture of what ethics is, a metaethical picture, which will lend comprehensibility to many of the specific theoretical interventions and reticences of poststructuralist discourse. That picture displays ethical life not as a matter of foundations upon which political analyses are constructed (again, there is a rejection of the top-down approach), but as a practice—what Wittgenstein might have called a "form of life"—that interacts with as well as supports poststructuralist political writings.

In order to understand the context within which the need for an alternative approach to political philosophy has arisen, it is necessary to trace the fate of the political philosophy of Marxism as it has unfolded over the course of this century. This tracing will offer a more specific look at the spaces for theorizing that were opened up, and at those which were passed over, and will thus prepare us for a discussion of the anarchist alternative to strategic political thinking. For it is Marxism that has dominated strategic thinking for the past hundred years; and in its demise the first lessons for future political thought can be drawn.

occurs solely at the ethical level, it must be replied that the equilibrium being sought is not between specific and general ethical claims, but between concrete ethical reactions to the situation in which we find ourselves and general principles to guide those reactions. Interpreted thus, it is the concrete ethical reactions that carry contextual considerations into reflections upon justice. The distinction between formal and strategic thinking falls not along any strict demarcation between philosophy and program, but between a reliance on one of the poles of what is and what ought to be and an immersion in the tension between the two.

We must abandon the idea of a clear demarcation to be made between political philosophy and political programs. This will become even more evident when we consider tactical political philosophy. However, we need not abandon the distinction altogether. Rather, since neither political philosophy nor political programs can escape addressing both what is and what ought to be, the difference must be seen as one of degree rather than one of kind. As one moves away from analysis and toward suggestions for intervention, one passes from philosophy to programmatics. This passage is not a displacement from the is-pole to the oughtpole, but rather a withdrawal from both at the same time: from the tension that is the space of political philosophy. For a political program, this tension lies in the background; its issues are resolved. The programmatic question, like the strategic one, is "What is to be done?" But in the programmatic instance, more general considerations of context and ethics are the horizon within which the intervention is worked out, rather than the subject of investigation. In this sense, *The Prince* is an example of a limit-case; it can be read either strategically or programmatically.

One of the central characteristics which binds various strategic political philosophies together, and which distinguishes them from tactical political philosophy, is that a strategic political philosophy involves a unitary analysis that aims toward a single goal. It is engaged in a project that it regards as the center of the political

universe. For Marxists, of course, the substructure of economic relations holds that central position. For Machiavelli, it was the rule of Italy. In strategic thinking, the variety of oppressions and injustices that pervade a society and the possibility of justice are located in a single problematic; if that problematic is properly analyzed and the right conclusions for intervention are drawn, then justice, inasmuch as it can be had, will be had. This is the source of the Marxist distinction between base and superstructure. The base generates (in a sense that is, of course, a source of dispute among Marxists) the superstructure. Political and social change, if it is to be significant, must rest upon a transformation at the base. Reducibility, then, lies at the core of strategic political thinking. All problems can be reduced to the basic one; justice is a matter of solving the basic problem.

Strategic political philosophy can be thought loosely to picture its world as a set of concentric circles, with the core or base problematic lying at the center, and the derivative problematics surrounding it at various distances. This does not mean that the world, or the central circle, is in any sense immutable or stable. For Marxists, the core undergoes revolutionary changes over the course of history, although it remains an economic core. It would even be possible to imagine a philosophy that had a shifting core: at one historical moment it is economic; at another, political. What is crucial is not the content or nature of the core circle, but the fact that thinking proceeds concentrically. This is what distinguishes it from tactical thinking, which pictures the social and political world not as a circle but instead as an intersecting network of lines.

Tactical political philosophy shares with strategic thought a preference to dwell within the tension of the is- and the ought-pole. Like strategic thought, it sees an interplay between the two that renders futile any attempt to articulate an adequate political philosophy through a reliance primarily upon one pole. However, tactical thought introduces another tension into the equation. Strategic political philosophy, in arguing for or assuming a central problem-

criticism, destruction, and overthrow of the power mechanism itself."[24]

If twentieth-century experiments with socialism have taught us anything, it is that changes of power at the top do not bring social transformation. One can argue that this is because power remains concentrated at the top and never becomes distributed among those affected by it; such is one current of anarchist thought. If so, one needs only to start seizing power from the bottom. But this argument relies on an assumption upon which the specific analyses of the poststructuralists have cast doubt: that power is exercised *upon* the bottom but not at the bottom. If the exercise of power does not consist solely of the suppression of legitimate claims but comes into play in the very constitution of those claims, then it no longer makes sense to conceive of the bottom as a pure fertile ground within which to plant the seeds of a new society. More pointedly, if power is exercised not just from the top down as a coercive force, then the very picture of top and bottom is rendered suspect. In fact, the picture of top and bottom, like that of concentric circles, if the poststructuralist analysis of psychology and psychoanalysis, sexuality, language, and so on are correct, yields misleading metaphors of a strategic form of political thinking that misses its object—or, better, objects. Underlying both strategic and tactical thinking, at least in most of the examples treated thus far, is a political orientation that has generally been labeled "radical," "leftist," or "progressive." This orientation possesses a deep mistrust of current political arrangements and a (sometimes quite vague) set of ethical commitments. One might query why it is only this orientation that has been—and will be—discussed here. This limitation gives the appearance of an assumption that the question of justice has already been answered,

[24] Foucault, "The Politics of Soviet Crime" (1976), trans. Mollie Horwitz. reprinted in Foucault *Live,* ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e], 1989), p. 130.

struggles at various levels derives from refusing what is in fact a strategic concentration of power. This in turn has often led to attempts, such as the terrorist attacks against heads of state, to eliminate power at a perceived source. Moreover, almost all anarchists rely on a unitary concept of human essence: the human essence is good; therefore, there is no need for the exercise of power. The concept of human essence has been criticized by poststructuralists as another facet of strategic thinking, one that leads to its own practices of oppression. These problems, and the relationship between anarchism and poststructuralism, will be treated in detail in Chapters 3 to 5.

The question must arise, however, after the delineation of these three types of political philosophy, Why turn toward the tactical? If we are unsatisfied with specific articulations of other philosophies, this does not entail that we must reject wholesale the type of philosophical and political perspective out of which they emerge. It is, after all, no argument against democracy that Rousseau had a flawed notion of the social contract. Much of the argument for tactical philosophy will be presented over the course of the present essay; however, a hint of its appeal should be offered at the outset. In an interview with Partisan *Review,* Michel Foucault said,

> "the mechanisms of power in the Soviet Union—systems of control, of surveillance, punishment—are versions of those used on a smaller scale and with less consistency by the bourgeoisie as it struggled to consolidate its power... One can say to many socialisms, real or dreamt: Between the analysis of power in the bourgeois state and the idea of its nature withering away, there is a missing term—the analysis,

atic within the purview of which all injustices can be accounted for, carries with it the implication that power derives essentially or for the most part from the site upon which that problematic focuses. If an analysis of the economy is the central problematic, then the economic structure must be the essential or most important site of power. Otherwise, focusing upon it would be useless. There is no need for a strategy to intervene at a point where no power is exercised; where there is no power, there can be no injustice. (This does not mean that power is conscious coercion; advertising or ideology are exercises of power as much as wage control or police enforcement.) Power, for the strategic political philosopher, emanates (at least primarily) from a center.

For tactical political philosophy, there is no center within which power is to be located. Otherwise put, power, and consequently politics, are irreducible. There are many different sites from which it arises, and there is an interplay among these various sites in the creation of the social world. This is not to deny that there are points of concentration of power or, to keep with the spatial image, points where various (and perhaps bolder) lines intersect. Power does not, however, originate at those points; rather, it conglomerates around them. Tactical thought thus performs its analyses within a milieu characterized not only by the tension between what is and what ought to be, but also between irreducible but mutually intersecting practices of power.

For this reason, tactical thought opposes strategic thought at another crucial point. If there is a central problematic and a central site of power, then it is possible that there are those who are peculiarly well placed to analyze and to lead the resistance against the power relationships of that site. Their well-placed position may derive from their knowledge of that site, or from their involvement with it, or from their place within the social order which allows them effective access to means of pressure. In short, strategic political philosophy lends itself to the type of intervention that has come to be associated with a vanguard party. Tactical thought,

because of its perspective, rejects the idea of liberation through a vanguard. If power is decentralized, if the sites of oppression are numerous and intersecting, it is hardly likely that any one set of individuals will find itself peculiarly suited to a vanguardist role in political change. What has come to be called the poststructuralist critique of representation is, at the political level, precisely a refusal of the vanguard, of the idea that one group or party could effectively represent the interests of the whole.

Poststructuralism, particularly as it is embodied in the works of Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard, has defined a tradition of the type of political philosophy we have here called "tactical."[20] The political commitments of these thinkers run directly counter to the dominant traditions of political philosophy, be they formal or strategic, and define a possibility for political philosophizing that offers a new, and perhaps better, perspective for political intervention. In order to circumscribe their project strictly, we must realize as well that the texts of these thinkers diverge not only from those of their contemporaries in other countries and traditions, but also from the work of French contemporaries who have been classified as poststructuralist. Jacques Derrida, for instance, though sharing some of these thinkers' epistemological and metaphysical commitments, remains without a clearly articulated political philosophy.[21] On the other hand, Jean Baudrillard, though focused upon politics, is a strategic thinker rather than a tactical one. His thought tends toward the reductionist and comprehensive rather than the multi-

ple and local.[22] Henceforth, we shall reserve the term "poststructuralist" for the common perspective sketched by the work of Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard. Nothing of philosophical significance is meant to hang on this reservation; it is merely a convenient way of circumscribing a political line of thought.

There is a tradition of political thinking that, though ambivalent regarding its commitment between tactical and strategic thinking, possesses the kinds of general political perspective and analysis that could characterize it as a forerunner to current poststructuralist thought. That is the tradition of anarchism. Moreover, anarchism, since it has articulated its philosophy in a general way rather than through specific analyses, provides the outline of a framework within which to understand poststructuralist political philosophy. Like poststructuralism, anarchism rejects representational political intervention. For anarchists, the concentration of power is an invitation to abuse. Therefore anarchists seek political intervention in a multiplicity of irreducible struggles. As Kropotkin wrote, "[A] further advance in social life does not lie in the direction of a further concentration of power and regulative functions in the hands of a governing body, but in the direction of decentralization, both territorial and functional."[23]

However, the reasons traditional anarchism offers for decentralization do not always converge with tactical political philosophy. Although many anarchists have understood that there is a symmetry between struggle and oppression—that the reason struggle is to be conducted at many points is that power is exercised at many points—there exists a competing strain in anarchist thought that views decentralization as an *alternative* to the current social structure of centralization. For this strain, the necessity for multiple

---

[20] This is not to say that there aren't others. Much in current feminist political thought seems confluent with the concept of tactical political philosophy as delineated here. A treatment of such thought, however, would, as noted above in the preface, lie outside both the scope of this text and my expertise.

[21] Derrida has, of course, both written on and participated in political affairs. He has not, however, articulated—and would probably resist doing so—a more comprehensive political perspective.

[22] For more on this tendency in Baudrillard, see Douglas Kellner's discussion Jean *Baudnllard:* From *Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989), esp. chap. 3.

[23] Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism" (1887), in Kropotkin's *Revolutionary* Pamphlets, ed. Roger Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 51.

to ensure that those who make the decisions and those who are affected by them are the same people.

The question that arises, however, for those whose goal is the negation of power (understood as a suppressive force), is this: Why should one believe that its removal, or diminution, will lead to a better society? What are the grounds for holding that justice and power are mutually opposing? This question goes to the heart of anarchist thought. With few exceptions (Colin Ward being one), the answer has always been the same: the human essence is a good essence, which relations of power suppress or deny. Perhaps the clearest statement of that position is represented by Kropotkin's book Mutual *Aid,* a reply to Darwin which attempts to show that cooperation among humans and other animals in an effort to further their family, neighbors, and at times species is as much a motive force of action as competition for survival, "Sociability," Kropotkin claimed, "and the need of mutual aid and support are such inherent parts of human nature that at no time of history can we discover men living in small isolated families, fighting each other for the means of subsistence."[39] Murray Bookchin offers a similar, if more nuanced, sentiment: "[T]he revolutionary project must take its point of departure from a fundamental libertarian precept: every normal human being is competent to manage the affairs of society and, more specifically, the community in which he or she is a member."[40]

At the core of much of the anarchist project is the assumption, first, that human beings have a nature or essence; and, second, that that essence is good or benign, in the sense that it possesses the characteristics that enable one to live justly with others in society. Whether the goodmaking characteristics go by the name of "sociability," "cooperation," or "competence," the thought remains the

---

[39] Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London, Hememann, 1902), p. 118.
[40] Bookchm, *Remaking Society*, p. 174.

totalization that Horkheimer and Adorno claim has become the lot of contemporary society?

It seems that Habermas wants his notion of the ideal speech situation to do double duty. He wants it to possess the power of a reality that provides a space from which well-grounded critique could arise. But, knowing that conceiving it as a reality is incoherent, he at least hopes that by providing a strategic analysis of its presupposition, he can create an opening for some sort of challenge to advanced capitalist culture. In fact, the concept fails on both counts. Within the structure of rationality that Habermas elucidates, the notion of the ideal speech situation must be an achievable goal if it is to be strategically efficacious. It cannot coherently be thought to be achievable, though, so the strategy fails.

Habermas's dilemma is inseparable from his strategic foundation. Like the Critical Theorists, he theorizes under the shadow of a pervasive capitalist culture. What he seeks is a refuge that will allow him, and others, to construct effective resistance. Unlike the Critical Theorists, and unlike Lenin, Habermas moves decisively away from the idea of a vanguard. The space he attempts to open up for critique is available to all, and the groups he cites as speaking from that space are not vanguard groups. It is not even entirely clear that Habermas is committed to one struggle as constituting the fundamental goal of resistance. However, in seeing capitalism as the sole source of the problem, Habermas's thought remains within the constellation of traditional Marxist thought.

For Habermas, the social space is configured not by sets of intersecting practices, each with its own power relationships that sometimes coalesce with others at certain points. Instead, capitalism covers the whole of social space; it is unitary in its colonization of the lifeworld. Thus, every act of resistance is an arrow aimed at the same target. The ultimate goal can only be the destruction—or, at least, the significant weakening—of this target. What is valuable about the various recuperations of the lifeworld in the activities of tactically oriented groups like feminists and ecologists does not re-

side in the specific local effects of their interventions. Rather, their value is in loosening the hold that capitalism has on our lives and especially on our discourse. Thus, at the terminus of Habermas's thought, there is, if not one struggle, then one end to all the multifarious struggles, an end without which they would have no significance. It is this single end, made necessary by the single enemy with which he sees us faced, that motivates a strategic analysis. And that analysis, though it avoids the totalitarianism of Leninism and the despair of Horkheimer and Adorno, falls prey to the monistic perspective that motivated it. Had capitalism not been, for Habermas, the overarching principle of our social space, he would have had no need to resort to a quasi-transcendental structure whose resources he could not utilize for the political intervention he sought.

The strategic lineage of Western Marxism is not, of course, exhausted by the Critical Theorists. Two other Marxist traditions, existentialist Marxism and structuralist Marxism, have helped define the space of Marxist political philosophy. Structuralist Marxism, through its leading proponent Louis Althusser, saw itself in direct opposition to existentialist Marxism and the latter's emphasis on the early, humanist Marx.[33] Sartre's culminating philosophical work *A Critique of Dialectical Reason*[34] was an attempt to show, against more determinist interpretations of Marx, that a Marxism could be articulated that was consonant with the idea of people as essentially free beings. Although much has been made of the dispute between existentialism and structuralism, both types of Marxism are agreed on several central tenets: first, that history is not predetermined; second, that any conception of people as free beings does not imply that they have control over the direction their

this assumption about power is made, however, it suffuses the entire domain of political philosophy.

If power is suppressive, then the central political question to be asked is: When is the exercise of power legitimate, and when is it not? For liberalism, the answer lies in the ways in which those with power came to acquire it and the rules by which they exercise it. Marxism answers the question in a similar way; its rules, however, differ from those of liberalism. Anarchists are suspicious of all power, even the kind that we have called "administrative." Sebastien Faure identified the common characteristic of anarchists as "the *negation of the principle of* Authority in social *organizations and the hatred of all constraints that originate in institutions founded on this principle.*"[36] Bakunin claimed that "it is the characteristic of privilege and of every privileged position to kill the mind and heart of men."[37] More recently, David Wieck has written: "Anarchism can be understood as the *generic* social and political idea that expresses negation of *all* power, sovereignty, domination, and hierarchical division, and a will to their dissolution; *and* expresses rejection of all dichotomizing concepts that on the grounds of nature, reason, history, God divide people into those dominant and those justly subordinated."[38] For the anarchist, it is in the nature of power to oppress by suppression. Using Hegelian terminology, power is a negation that must itself be negated. This negation cannot perhaps be fully accomplished, Nevertheless, it is the goal to which anarchism aspires. Thus, when it is said that power must remain in the hands of those who are affected by it, we must understand that the goal of keeping power there is to separate power from the negative effects of which it is capable. Decisionmaking involves power; the way to negate the effects of such power are

---

[33] See, for example, Althusser's article entitled "The '1844 Manuscripts' of Karl Marx," in *For Marx,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979), esp. p. 155, and Reading Capital, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), esp. chap. 5, "Marxism Is Not a Historicism."

[34] Trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: New Left Books, 1976).

---

though he criticizes Foucault's concept of power, Poulantzas clearly draws much of his analysis from it.

[36] In *The Anarchist Reader,* ed Woodcock, p. 62.

[37] Bakunin, *God and the State,* p. 31.

[38] Wieck, "The Negativity of Anarchism." p. 139.

seen in the two readings—one strategic, one tactical—that can be drawn from the above passage on decentralization by Kropotkin.

This ambivalence does not exhaust itself in the anarchist attitude toward federalism. As has been noted, anarchists are also ambivalent about whether the state is only one site of the exercise of power or the key site. During the late nineteenth century, there were numerous anarchist assassination attempts against heads of state and assaults against the symbols of their power.[34] The ambivalence that haunted, and to some extent still haunts, the anarchist movement and its theoreticians (most of the crucial ones are from the latter half of the nineteenth century) is the spectre of reducibility: Are the struggle and the vision which motivates that struggle reducible to a single strategic goal, or instead are anarchism's tactical moments its proper articulation? In order to understand this ambivalence within anarchism, we must return to its conception of power, for it is from there that the ambivalence issues.

Power, as we have seen, constitutes for the anarchists a suppressive force. The image of power with which anarchism operates is that of a weight, pressing down—and at times destroying—the actions, events, and desires with which it comes in contact. This image is common not only to Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, and the nineteenth-century anarchists generally, but to contemporary anarchists as well. It is an assumption about power that anarchism shares with liberal social theory, which sees power as a set of restraints-upon-action, prescribed primarily by the state and whose justice depends upon the democratic status of that state. Marxism, too, is oriented for the most part by the assumption that power is suppressive, although the work of Antonio Gramsci on hegemony and of contemporary Marxists like Nicos Poulantzas suggest that Marxism is compatible with an interpretation of power that sees it as productive as well as suppressive.[35] Once

---

[34] For more on this, see Joll's *The Anarchists*, esp. chap. 5.

[35] In addition to Gramsci's work on hegemony, see Poulantzas's *State. Power. Socialism* , trans. Patrick Catniller (London: New Left Books, 1978), esp. pt. 1. Al-

lives take; third, that Marxist philosophy is therefore a matter of interpreting a social complex with an economic substructure that is subject to crucial contingent events. Where they differ is in their respective appropriations of the second tenet. Existentialists posit social structures as the result of free activity that becomes sedimented and reacts back upon its actors: Sartre's "practico-inert." Structuralists do not have a conception of people as free beings; they do not deny freedom so much as they consider the idea of freedom irrelevant for political philosophy. Therefore, they focus on practices and social forces and ignore anthropological concerns. Since the two share a common strategic base, our focus here will be on structuralist Marxism as the more recently influential of the two.

Althusser's political thought can be seen as an attempt to struggle against all mechanist interpretations of Marx. Marxism, for Althusser, "rejects the theoretical presupposition of the Hegelian model: the presupposition of an original simple unity."[35] What characterizes Marxism is not a set of historical stages, each guided by a single principle, but rather a history that appears, at least on its surface, to be accidental and contingent. This is the motivation behind Althusser's concept of "overdetermination." Althusser defines the concept of overdetermination in explicit contrast to Hegelian contradiction in order to indicate the difference between a perspective that views history as the unfolding of a single thread and a perspective for which "the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal conditions of existence, and even from the *instances* it governs."[36]

Althusser's substitution of overdetermination for contradiction indicates that the economic relations of a given society do not form, in a traditional Marxist sense, the core from which the superstruc-

---

[35] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in For *Marx,* p 198

[36] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in *For Marx*, p. 101.

tural aspects of society arise. Instead, there is a profusion of social circumstances that "merge" into a concrete unity.[37] In order for a revolutionary situation to arise, then, there must be more at play in a specific historical conjuncture than merely the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production: "If this contradiction is to become 'active' in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of 'circumstance' and 'currents' so that whatever their origin and sense … they *fuse'* into a *ruptural unity.*"[38]

One may wonder at this point whether, in fact, there is any real Marxism left in Althusser's analysis. Is the substitution of overdetermination for contradiction a renunciation of the centrality of the economic, and with it a rejection of the very core of Marx's thought? The question seems more urgent given that Althusser claims to be defending Marxism as a scientific practice, not as a practice of accidents. What are we to make of Marx's "epistemological break" with the humanism of his early works if not a more rather than less tightly structured approach to our social situation?

Althusser himself provides the hint. "Marx has at least given us the 'two ends of the chain', and has told us to find out what goes on between them: on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production; on the other,* the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity."[39] *What goes on between them must be analyzed within a given historical context, as the product of forces specific to that context. This does not mean that there is no unity among those forces. Althusser describes a given social context as a "structure in dominance," dominated but not determined by the economic contradiction.[40] This is because, in order for the economic order to reproduce itself, in order for exploitation to be able to continue, it must be reinforced by a su-*

---

[37] Ibid., p. 100.
[38] Ibid, p. 99.
[39] Ibid, p. 111.
[40] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," p. 200–202.

the fundamental features of just social arrangements, just as the communist society was the definition of a just social arrangement according to Marx. The mutualist society was a "compact," one's agreement to which meant that "you become a part of the society of free men. All your brothers are bound to you, and promise you fidelity, friendship, aid, service, exchange."[31] For Kropotkin, an anarchist society was the next step in the natural historical progression toward increasing freedom and equality: "Socialism [here Kropotkin is referring to anarchist socialism] becomes thus *the* idea of the nineteenth century… [T]he watchword of socialism is: 'Economic freedom as the only secure basis for political freedom.'"[32] A few pages later, he writes, revealing the ambivalence of anarchism on this point: "It has thus become obvious that a further advance in social life does not lie in the direction of a further concentration of power and regulative functions in the hands of a governing body, but in the direction of decentralization, both territorial and functional."[33]

Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Bakunin, in their vision of an alternative society, engaged themselves in the contradictory project of calling for decentralization in order to resist the reductiveness of centralization while at the same time offering a vision of decentralization that was itself reductive. Anarchism need not be interpreted as entailing this contradiction; indeed, the anarchists did not always interpret themselves in this contradictory manner— and some contemporary anarchists (e.g., Ward), assiduously avoid it. However, the distinction between federalism as a tactic and as a strategy is not clear among many anarchists, particularly the founding ones. The ambivalence they have demonstrated can be

---

[31] Proudhon, *The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 295.
[32] Kropotkin, "Anarchist Communism" (1887), in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets,* p. 49.
[33] Ibid, p. 51.

genius."[29] Much of The Conquest *of Bread* consists of explorations in a variety of areas—food, clothing, agriculture—of current oppressive social arrangements as well as nascent mutualist and federalist possibilities.

The question these articulations of federalism raise is one of how they should be read. This question is not merely of passing interest; it goes to the heart of the interpretation of anarchism. Are they to be read as blueprints, however vague, for a new society? Or should they be read instead as suggestions for alternative arrangements for specific sectors in the social network? If the latter reading is chosen, then federalism remains compatible with tactical political thought. Federalist arrangements in certain sectors of political life do not preclude other arrangements elsewhere, where specific conditions may dictate, or invite, other types of social formation. Such a reading would be more in keeping with contemporary anarchists such as Ward or Bookchin.[30] It would allow not only for specific instances of federalism, but also for what more generally might be called "the federalist impulse" of retaining power as much as possible within the community affected by decisions. However, this is not always the way anarchists read themselves, particularly those of the nineteenth century.

Proudhon saw mutualism not as a tactical intervention into the problem of property, but rather as the alternative form society should take. His picture of strictly moral, reciprocally assisting, primarily agricultureally based social units was intended to define

---

[29] Ibid., p. 229.

[30] Bookchin is explicit on this point as regards the formation of a new society: "Sensibility, ethics, ways of building reality, and selfhood have to be changed by educational means, by a politics of reasoned discourse, experimentation, and the expectation of repeated failures from which we have to learn, if humanity is to achieve the self-consciousness it needs to finally engage in self-management" (*Remaking Society*, p. 189). There are parallels between his idea of experimentation and Foucault's and Deleuze's invitations to experiment with who we are (see Chapter 5 below), although these latter thinkers abandon assumptions about self-consciousness and an alienated self.

perstructure that defuses (and at times forcibly represses) dissent: "*it is possible and necessary to think what characterizes the essential of the existence and nature of the superstructure* on the basis of reproduction."[41] *However, in keeping with Lenin's theory of the "weakest link," it is possible that the weak point of the system, the point that needs to be pressed in order for the system to collapse, is in the superstructure rather than the substructure.[42] That is what lends history its contingency; and that is why Marx cannot tell us what goes on between the economic determination in the last instance and the relative autonomy of the superstructure.*

The science that Marx inaugurated, then, was the science of structures determined neither by a single thread of causality nor by any confluence of spiritual or ethical concerns. It was instead the science that understands structures as at once overdetermined and dominated: "[I]n Marxist theory, to say that contradiction is a motive force is to say that it implies *a real* struggle, *real confrontations, precisely located* within the structure *of the complex whole*."[43] (It is at this juncture that existentialist and structuralist interpretations of Marx converge most closely. The difference between them lies in the fact that existentialists see change as a product of the dialectic between human freedom and its sedimented practices, while structuralists see it as a product of practices intervening in the social structure.) On this understanding, theory itself becomes "a *specific form of practice,*" for to engage in theory is to enter the social context at a given point, perhaps a revolutionary one.[44]

Althusser's appropriation of Marx is, quite consciously, a Leninist one.[45] Against readings of Marx that are either humanist or

---

[41] Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1970), in *Lenin and Philosophy* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p. 136.

[42] See Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," pp. 94–96.

[43] Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic," p 215.

[44] Ibid, p. 167.

[45] See, for example, his "Lenin and Philosophy," in Lenin and *Philosophy*.

reductionist, Althusser wanted to reassert Marxism as a coherent diagnosis of political reality and an adequate recommendation for political action. In the end, however, his Marxism stumbled over the same reality that drove Critical Theory to its perspective on the pervasiveness of capital: there was no significant evidence of a proletarian desire for communism. Unlike Lenin, Althusser did not find himself in a revolutionary situation of the type he sought. The one time he did find himself in a context where the social bonds appeared to be unraveling—during the events of May 1968 in Paris—he refused to condemn the Communist Party's collusion with the De Gaulle government to quell the uprising, since it was not worker-led.[46] One may wonder at this theoretician-of-contingency's silence regarding the conservative communist position taken toward the student—and, later, worker—rebellion. However, Althusser's commitment to Leninist Marxism could lead him down no other path. Political intervention, even into a historically contingent situation, had to be of a certain type: oriented toward a dictatorship of the proletariat. Since the student rebellion did not appear to be of that type, he could not defend it. But since, alternatively, the proletariat did not develop into a revolutionary force, he was left with nowhere to turn. Perhaps a continuation of revolutionary theory, or perhaps a historically contingent event, will draw the battle lines more clearly and sharpen the struggle. At present, though, that does not appear to be the movement of history.

There is a thread of Althusser's thought, however, which, if followed in a different direction, leads along a path whose end is the

In *The Conquest of Bread,* Kropotkin presents a vision of federalism that also relies on mutual cooperation rather than state socialism. In fact, he claims, mutual cooperation, though unrecognized as such, is already prevalent in the society of his time:

> Accustomed as we are by hereditary prejudices and our unsound education and training to represent ourselves the beneficial hand of Government, legislation, and magistracy everywhere, we have come to believe that man would tear his fellow-man to pieces like a wild beast the day the police took eye off him... And with our eyes shut we pass by thousands and thousands of human groupings which form themselves freely ... and attain results infinitely superior to those achieved under government tutelage.[28]

Kropotkin points to the cases of the international rail system of Europe and the Red Cross as examples of mutual cooperation voluntarily undertaken with the goal (albeit it a goal in the former case also affected by financial considerations) of enhancing the lives of all involved. Moreover, he sees no reason to assume that these examples are exceptional. Rather, they point toward a possibility that capitalism does more to stifle than to promote. In an anarchist society there would be "a new harmony, the initiative of each and all, the daring which springs from the awakening of a people's

---

which classification of the people by Industries replaces classification by *caste*"; "Collective power, the principle of WORKINGMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS, in place of armies"; "Commerce, the concrete form of ConTract, which takes the place of *Law*"; "Equality in exchange"; "Competition"; "Credit, which turns upon INTERESTs, as the governmental hierarchy turns upon *obedience*"; and "The equilibrium of values and properties" (p. 244). For more on Proudhon's attempts to build a mutualist society, see Joll's The *Anarchists,* chap. 3, and George Woodcock's *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co, 1962). chap. 5.

[28] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread,* ed. Paul Avrich (New York: New York University Press, 1972), p. 145.

---

[46] For more on the relationships between the French Communist Party and the events of 1968, see Richard Johnson's *The* French Communist Party Versus the Students. Revolutionary Politics in May-June 1968 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), esp. chap 5, which details the relationships between communist intellectuals and the student movement.

who must bear its effects. That the political/administrative distinction is a relative one, rather than absolute, does not diminish its capacity to serve as a vision for action, one that is distinct from both the Marxist and the liberal vision.

The variety of forms that federalism can assume has given rise to a small literature within anarchism. Many, like Bakunin, saw federalism as the product of a struggle whose end point could not be determined. For him, the first step toward federalism was the abolition of the right of inheritance, a proposal that he thought would subvert private property.[26] Others, notably Proudhon and Kropotkin, had more concrete proposals. For Proudhon, federalism had to be achieved not by destruction of current social arrangements but by building a new society from the ground up. In order to do this, two components were essential. The first one, a strong work ethic, relied on the nostalgic principle that a good society required morally good members and that morally good members would return to work the land with their hands. The second component, which he tried to enact, was more material. In order for an alternative community to arise, there had to be means for development. Therefore, the formation of a credit association was essential. (Proudhon actually tried—unsuccessfully—to maintain a credit association.) For him. then, federalism was inextricably bound to what was called "mutualism," mutual reliance and help in the common project of forming a society without private property and without representation: *The system of contracts,* substituted for the *system of laws,* would constitute the true government of the man and of the citizen; the true sovereignty of the people, the REPUBLIC."[27]

---

[26] For more on this proposal and its history in the First International, see Thomas, Karl *Marx and the Anarchists,* p. 310; for Bakunin's own words on the matter, one source is in *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* , pp. 108–10.

[27] P. J. Proudhon, The *General Idea of theRevolution in the Nineteenth Century,* trans. John Beverley Robinson (London: Freedom Press, 1923), p. 206 Proudhon goes on to outline the activities of a mutualist society: "Division of labor, through

subversion of strategic political thinking.[47] Such a thread emerges in Althusser's view that theory is a practice in a contingent historical context. If this is so, then theory is not just a matter of "getting it right," of speaking the sole truth of its object of discourse. It is also a matter of providing a tool for those who need one. Although this view is shared by Marxists generally, in Althusser's writings it assumes a predominant position. This is because his thought is so concerned with the place of theory in revolutionary struggle. Withdrawn from its investment in being the one true science, this view leads to a recognition that there may be many truths about the social space, of which some are more important for certain struggles than others. The idea that theory ought to be practiced alongside those for whom the theory is written constitutes a radical change in perspective. It admits the possibility of several true theories of social space, but ties its own theory to the struggle it aims to support. The fruition of such thinking, remaining within a Marxist orientation, lies in the work of the *autonomia* movement in Italy during the 1970s.

The autonomy movement was an attempt to reassert revolutionary proletarian subjectivity in Western Europe. It can be read in opposition to Critical Theory, whose "concept of domination is so complete that the 'dominated' virtually disappears as an active historical subject," in the words of the American autonomy theorist Harry Cleaver.[48] The autonomy movement tried to reconstruct the proletariat, both at the practical and the theoretical level, as an autonomous subjectivity with its own interests. This subjectivity was

---

[47] Laclau and Mouffe also see a move away from what I call "strategic thinking" in Althusser. locating it in his introduction of the concept of "overdetermination." They are lesssympathetic with Althusserian theory generally, however, interpreting Althusser's talk of economic determination in the last instance as being precisely a determination rather than, as I have taken it, a domination. (See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 97–105, esp. 99 and 104.

[48] Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979). p. 42.

sought not through ceding proletarian power to representatives in a vanguard party (in fact, the autonomy movement developed in direct opposition to the Italian Communist Party), but through a reclaiming of everyday life in its various aspects: as workers, as homemakers, as students, as consumers, and so on.

The crucial theoretical move in the *autonomia* strategy was the emphasis in Marx's analysis of capitalism on two distinct and irreconcilable classes. Antonio Negri, the major theorist of *autonomia,* insisted in *Marx Beyond Marx* that Marx's crucial text is the more open *Grundrisse* rather than the scientific *Capital.* He summed up Marx's emphasis on irreconcilability thus: "antagonism is *the motor of development of the system"*[49] Capitalism develops as the separation and mutual antagonism of two classes; as the development proceeds, the antagonism deepens. This renewed emphasis on class conflict, however, requires an account of how polarization can occur in the wake of the failure of Marx's prediction of increasing immiseration. This account was provided in autonomia's discussions of "the social factory." As the Critical Theorists understood, capitalism tends to expand its control into every corner of the social space, promoting a "homogenization"[50] of society under the reign of capital: "Capital is the totality of labor and life."[51] All of social life under capitalism, then, tends toward becoming a factory in which the capitalist requirement—the exploitation of surplus value—is most perfectly met. This tendency can be seen in the free work that housewives and students perform without which capitalism could not survive.[52]

The effect of this tendency of capitalism is not, however, as the Critical Theorists saw it, to subsume the proletariat under its reign.

---

[49] Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano (South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1984), p. 54.

[50] Ibid, p. 113.

[51] Ibid., p. 122.

[52] For more on the social factory and its relationship to the feminist movement in Italy, see Cleaver's *Reading Capital Politically*, pp. 57–62.

that "the legislative power belongs, and can only belong, to the people."[24] For Rousseau, however, matters are not so simple. This is because, when people join together as one society by means of the social contract, the principle of their association is "the total alienation by each associate of himself and all his rights to the whole community."[25] Now Rousseau distinguishes this total alienation of rights from slavery by noting that since the alienation is universal within the community, no one actually is subjected to any effects of that alienation. This is the foundation of the "general will." However, the damage has been done, because the alienation of rights creates, in the form of the general will, a representative of individual wills that tells them who they are and what they want. As *The Social Contract* progresses, the deleterious consequences of this first act of alienation and representation become unmistakable: the suppression of particular interests, the life-and-death power of the prince, the role of the lawgiver, all these are descendants of the transfer of political power to a general body, even if that body is defined as being oneself in one's generality.

Anarchists are more consistent in keeping political power at the local level while utilizing smaller bodies only for administrative ends. However, the distinction, as it stands, is too facile; for how is the administrative body to act without any power at all? Regardless of whether one sees power as repressive or as productive also, it is inconceivable that an administrative body could act without at some point exercising at least influence, if not coercion. To this it must be agreed. The distinction between the political and the administrative is not hard-and-fast. But this is only another way of saying that politics is not science. The thrust of the anarchist point is clear: inasmuch as possible, power is to stay with those

---

[24] J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 101.

[25] Ibid., p. 60.

articulation: "No policy, in effect, is democratically legitimate unless it has been proposed, discussed, and decided upon by the people directly—not through representatives or surrogates of any kind. The administration of these policies can be left to boards, commissions, or collectives of qualified, even elected individuals who, under close public purview and with full accountability to policy-making assemblies, may execute the popular mandate."[22] Decisions are to be taken by those who are directly—and often indirectly—affected by those decisions (preferably by consensus but perhaps at times by vote); the implementation of those decisions can be performed by a group that is smaller than, and perhaps other than, those affected.[23] Thus, in contrast to parliamentary rule, those who implement decisions are not empowered to make them: there is no such thing as representation at the political level, the level of power. Neither is there representation at the administrative level, because in administration no one speaks in the name of anyone else. All that can occur at that level is acting on behalf of others, and on their direct orders.

The distinction between the political and the administrative is not unique to anarchism. It is given an extended articulation, for instance, in Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, where he distinguishes between the legislative and the executive on analogy with a person's engagement in free action: the legislative is like the will which proposes the action, and the executive like the physical strength which carries it out. Rousseau states categorically

_____

[22] Bookchin, *Remaking Society, p. 175.*

[23] The distinction between the political and the administrative marks a dividing line between what have been called the "collective anarchists" and the "individualist anarchists," such as Max Stirner and Benjamin Tucker. The latter have been associated more with the conservative tradition, of which Robert Nozick would be a contemporary example. The former form the bulk of the anarchist tradition and have given it its reputation as a radical progressive movement. Only for them could the question of how people should act in concert arise The present essay deals solely with them. (It is worth noting that Proudhon, though generally considered among the collectivists, has strong individualist tendencies as well.)

Rather, it is to bring unity to the various social groups that suffer under capitalism. Unity is a product not of increasing immiseration, but instead of a common recognition of different but complementary experiences of exploitation by capital. The struggle of the working classes, then, whose numbers as counted by the autonomy movement were much greater because of the inclusiveness of its analysis, was to break the homogenization of capital and to reintroduce—and satisfy—the multiplicity of needs that make up people's lives. According to Negri: "Working class power is the negation of the power of capital. It is the negation of the centralized and homogeneous power of the bourgeoisie, of the political classes of capital. It is the dissolution of all homogeneity."[53]

This dissolution, however, cannot come "from above," in the form of the seizure of the state. It must arise at the level of people's daily lives. What *autonomia* proposed was a refusal of all attempts to extract surplus value, whether that refusal involved work slowdowns, demands for wages by students and housewives, or noncooperation with the rituals of capitalism. Capitalism would be subverted "from below" or not at all. Moreover, this subversion of capital and the development of alternatives to it did not constitute a revolutionary transition that would lead to another stage in history called "communism." The refusal of submission to capitalism was itself the construction of communism: "It is not a question of defining the transition in terms of communism but rather ... to *define communism by the transition.*"[54] Once capitalism is seen clearly as the enemy, people will assert their subjectivity not by entrusting themselves to a group that promises to represent them in seizing the state, but rather by asserting that subjectivity directly: in refusing to participate in the process of the exploitation of surplus value and, concomitantly, in seeking

_____

[53] Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx, p. 150.*

[54] Fri, p. 154.

ways to develop different and fulfilling lives in the complexity of the social space that becomes open to them through such refusal.

The autonomy movement shares with Habermas's theory both a rationale for hope and a rejection of vanguard politics. Like Habermas, it seeks to develop a theory that can be enacted by the individuals affected by oppression, rather than by a group representing those individuals. Moreover, the autonomy movement can be seen as an advance over Habermas in that it attempts to construct its interventions in social space rather than in a quasi-transcendental space of communication. Still, it remains haunted by the same problem that motivated the theoretical developments of Habermas, Althusser, and the entirety of the post-1917 Western Marxist tradition: the disparity between theory and reality. It is true that during the 1970s there were multiple and overlapping forms of resistance in Italian society.[55] But through a combination of suppression (the Italian government attempted to frame Negri himself for the murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro) and lack of internal development, the communist transition did not take place. By the early 1980s, any momentum it once had was lost.

Even in its failure, however, the autonomy movement introduced an element that, divested of Marxist strategic analysis, points the way toward another political analytic, one that resides not within the confines of a unified and unsurpassable single analysis but in the diversity of multiple and irreducible analyses. *Autonomia* recognized the multiplicity of positions, each with its own interest, in contemporary society; it endorsed divergence over homogeneity. This recognition carries Althusser's notion of class-bound analyses a step farther. Within the context of autonomy, there is no question of a science of the social space. Theory and practice are too intertwined, and *almost* too locally

---

[55] For summaries of these movements, see Cleaver's Reading *Capital* Politically, pp. 51–66, and Michael Ryan's brief historical introduction to Negri's Marx *Beyond Marx.* pp. xxvii-xxx.

ary changes, but to admit that they are changes of degree rather than of kind—or, better, that they are changes of kind inasmuch as they are certain kinds of changes of degree. Michel Foucault recognized this point as well:

> It seems to me that this whole intimidation with the bogy of reform is linked to the lack of a strategic analysis [in our terms, a tactical analysis] appropriate to political struggle, to struggles in the field of political power. The role for theory today seems to me to be just this: not to formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyse the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic [i.e., tactical] knowledge.[21]

Concomitant with those revolutionary changes of degree, anarchists have put forward a vision of what is to replace the power relationships that are struggled against. Although anarchists differ in the depth and sophistication of their proposals (a difference that is significant for whether anarchism can be considered a strategic or a tactical political philosophy, as will be seen presently), what they agree on has generally been termed "federalism." Federalism arises from a recognition that in any area of social life, there has to be a balance between, on the one hand, the power of individuals and small groups to decide their lives and, on the other, the fact that those decisions affect and are affected by the social context in which they are made. The question, then, is how to keep power from being delegated to representatives while still accomplishing the larger tasks that social life requires.

The fundamental distinction that federalism involves is between political power and administrative power. Bookchin gave it this

---

[21] Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 145.

strategic character of Marxism, is brought out by Murray Bookchin: "In contrast to the anarchist policy of continually pressing against the society in search of its weak-points and trying to open areas that would make revolutionary change possible, Marxian theory was structured around a strategy of 'historical limits' and 'stages of development.'"[20] The tactical character of resistance, as Bookchin recognizes, does not preclude it from making changes that ramify throughout society. To presuppose that tactics can only be "reformist" is to neglect an important factor: namely, that included in the picture of the political character of social space as a network of lines is the fact that power conglomerates at certain points and is reinforced along certain lines. Successful political intervention at those points is bound to have effects across larger regions of social networks, vibrating throughout them, as it were.

The mistake that is made in contrasting revolution to reform lies in the assumption that the former involves a qualitative change in society, while the latter involves only a quantitative change. However, on the alternative picture of politics being sketched here, there are in reality only quantitative changes, qualitative ones being defined in terms of them. A revolution, then, is not a change from one fundamental form of society to another; rather, it is a change or set of changes whose effects sweep across the society, causing changes in many other parts of the social domain. No one, particularly not anarchists, would deny that a change in the relations of economic production would have profound effects upon society. What *is* denied is the move from that evident truth to the claim that society, and the question of revolution, must therefore be defined in terms of those relationships of production (or any other set of privileged relationships). Once the strategic picture of concentric circles or hierarchies of power is dropped, so is the idea that revolutionary change can be distinguished qualitatively from reformist change. This is not to deny the possibility of revolution-

---

[20] Bookchin, *Remaking Society,* p. 135.

determined, for that. Where the movement reverts to strategic thinking is in its monolithic interpretation of capital. If the multiplicity of interests and needs is to be asserted against a monolithic enemy, then the problem faced by Habermas returns in another guise: all struggle is subsumed into the common struggle against capitalism. There is no room for alternative struggles against other enemies if all struggles are measured and defined ultimately by their ability to resist the extraction of surplus value. In order to overcome this recurring limitation, which becomes a limitation precisely in its inability to become historically realized or even (at this moment of history) empirically plausible, there must be a break with Marxism. That break had already been made, in a preliminary fashion, by a theorist who preceded and influenced the autonomy movement: Cornelius Castoriadis.

Castoriadis's influence on French political philosophy began in 1949 with his cofounding, along with Claude Lefort, of the journal and group *Socialisme ou Barbarie.*[56] (Jean-François Lyotard was an early member of the group.) The journal's project was to analyze not only the changes in modern capitalist society but also the demise of the socialist project in the Soviet Union. Though still operating within a Marxist perspective, Castoriadis saw the dual hegemony of the United States and the USSR as a product of a new phenomenon (or, better, an old phenomenon with a new role): bureaucracy. The emergence of bureaucracy as a dominant economic form in the international order was traced to the financial collapse of 1929.[57] After the collapse, the movement toward the concentration of capital and its alliance with the state, which had been going on for fifty years, was accelerated on a world scale. In capitalist countries, this concentration remained in private hands, while in

---

[56] For a history of *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* see Arthur Hirsch's *The French New Left* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), esp. pp. 113–31.

[57] Cornelius Castoriadis, "Socialism or Barbarism" (1949), in Political and Social Writings, trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), esp. 1:82–84.

the USSR it became public. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the proletariat, the results were the same (except perhaps that the direct alliance of capital and the state in the USSR made exploitation more efficient). Indeed, "bureaucracy" is precisely this alliance between economic and political power and the social system that develops from it.

The ascendance of bureaucracy in contemporary society determined a new class struggle: "As traditional forms of property and the bourgeoisie of the classical period are pushed aside by State property and by the bureaucracy, the main conflict within society gradually ceases to be the old one between the owners of wealth and those without property and is replaced by the conflict between directors and executants in the process of production."[58] The proletariat is no longer defined as the group that sells its labor to those who own the means of production; rather, it is the group that executes the orders determined by those who direct the economic process from above. This is not to claim that ownership has changed hands; oftentimes, it has not. Instead, it is to claim that what determines exploitation is an economic-political matter, not just an economic one.

Castoriadis's analysis remained within the confines, though a bit at the margins, of Marxist analysis. It is certainly possible, and *Soctalisme on Barbarie* was one of the few leftist journals to attempt it, to offer a Marxist critique of an existing "socialist" state. Further, this criticism of the USSR is somewhat blunted by Castoriadis's claim that one of the main reasons for the Soviet decline into bureaucracy is the impossibility of socialism in only one country. (Castoriadis explains this impossibility as a product of the effort by capitalism to destroy any attempt to form a socialist society.) However, by 1958, Castoriadis had come to reject Marxism as a mode of analysis altogether. His rejection stemmed in part

---

[58] Ibid., 1:79.

image of a rhizome, a stem or root that branches out sideways and connects with other stems or roots without a recognizable source or center, to explain this picture of the social: "[U]nlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states… It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills."[17]

The search for a social space independent of the networks of political and social relationships that constitute it is similar to the search for a founding principle; each seeks its object outside what is actually given in order to account for what is given, rather than analyzing the given in its multiplicity and diversity. Its thinking, in the Deleuzian metaphor, is "arborescent" rather than "rhizomatic." There is a nascent strategic thinking behind the conception of social space as a medium, although it is perhaps less pernicious in its effects on political philosophy than the assumption of a single founding cause.[18]

Anarchist political intervention issues from a recognition of the network character of relationships of power and of the variety of intertwined but irreducible oppressions that devolve upon those relationships. Just as power and oppression are decentralized, so must resistance be. As Colin Ward notes, "There is no final struggle, only a series of partisan struggles on a variety of fronts."[19] The tactical character of this view of resistance, and its contrast with the

---

[17] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 21.

[18] I am not claiming that social space is reducible to its political character Although politics is everywhere in social space, and although that space should not be conceived in a Newtonian fashion—as a medium that exists outside the networks that define it—it is still possible to conceive of relationships that, though they involve power, are not reducible to relationships of power. Politics, though everywhere, is not everything.

[19] Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, p. 26.

The political character of social space can be seen, and is seen by anarchists and poststructuralists alike, in terms of intersections of power rather than emanations from a source. This is not to deny that some points of power, for instance the state, may be more determinative for the social configuration than others. (The claim that the characteristics of a specific state are the product of local conditions is not, of course, exclusive of the claim that, once in place, that state can react back in a determining fashion upon those conditions. Gilles Deleuze describes this possibility, which we shall see below in Chapter 5.) Nor is this to deny that certain relationships between points in a social space or field may be either more important for understanding that social configuration or more deeply reinforced than others: in our society, for instance, legal relationships are probably more important for understanding the politics of social space than religious ones, and psychological relationships more deeply reinforced than ethical ones. Thus, the picture of a network of intersecting power relationships is one in which certain points and certain lines may be bolder than others, but none of them functions as a center from which the others emerge or to which they return.

It is important to understand that the political picture of networks of power relationships is not a theoretical holism, if by that is meant that everything is connected to everything else in a single realm of relationships called "society." First, the connections are not to be presumed; they are to be discovered in the course of political analysis. Just as there can be no assumption that there is a founding cause for all relationships of power, there is no reason to assume that all those relationships are fundamentally related to one another. Moreover, it is misleading to think of them as functioning within a single medium. This is why even the term "social space" is not completely accurate. There is no empty space that gets filled in by political relationships; there are only the relationships themselves. "Social space" is the set of those relationships, not a space within which they arise. Deleuze and Guattari invoke the

from the Hungarian uprising of 1956,[59] which provided a model for worker self-management—*autogestion* was Castoriadis's term—and in part from the failure of the French working class to support communism in the elections of 1958, voting for De Gaulle instead.[60] By that time, it had become evident to Castoriadis that the problem of Soviet bureaucracy lay not within the twentieth-century appropriation of Marxism, but within Marxism itself. Further, in a series of articles from 1955 to 1958, he had delineated a picture of a self-managed society whose outlines had more in common with Proudhon's or Kropotkin's anarchism than with models associated with the Marxist tradition.[61] Castoriadis presented his alternative view most fully in his celebrated article "Modern Capitalism and Revolution."[62]

His argument there is twofold. First, the traditional Marxist picture of capitalism is wrong: it locates the problem in the wrong place. Second, however, there *is* a problem with capitalism, which does involve a fundamental contradiction and which requires recognition and struggle. Regarding the first part of the argument: "[F]or traditional Marxism, the 'objective' contradictions of capitalism were essentially economic, and the system's radical inability to satisfy the working class's economic demands made

---

[59] Castoriadis's analysis of the Hungarian uprising is presented in "The Proletarian Revolution Against the Bureaucracy," in vol. 2 of his Political and Social Writings The uprising's impact on him can be measured by his claim that "its repercussions, which are only beginning to be felt, will have transformed the world in this second half of the twentieth century" (2:58).

[60] On the evolution of Castoriadis's rejection of Marxism, see Hirsch, *The French New Left,* pp. 122–27. At the time, this rejection cost *Socialisme ou Barbare* the participation of, among others, Jean-Francois Lyotard. As will be seen below, Lyotard in his turn rejected Marxism for a more anarchist model.

[61] Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism," pt. 1 in vol. 1 of Political *and Social* Writings; pts. 2 and 3 in vol. 2. An exception to Marxist tradition with which Castonadis's later writings might have had affinities would be "council communism," discussed by David McClellan in Marxism *After Marx* (Boston: Houghton Mifflm, 1979), pp. 170–74.

[62] In Political and *Social Writings*, 2:226–343.

these the motive force of the class struggle."[63] This, Castoriadis shows, is plainly false. Marx himself grounded this motivation on his prediction of increasing immiseration, which was founded on the necessity for increasing exploitation, which itself was founded on the tendency toward a falling rate of profit. In fact, though, capitalists have been able to keep the rate of profit from falling without reducing workers to poverty.[64] Their having done so, however, does not signify that there is more justice in capitalism than Marx had given it credit for. It is because of working-class struggle—through unionization, strikes, and takeovers—that workers' standard of living has risen, rather than fallen.

Thus, Marx in fact made two mistakes: first, in assuming a falling rate of profit; second, and more damaging for revolutionary activity, in assuming that workers would allow themselves to be exploited to the point of poverty before they would act to better their situation. Writes Castoriadis: "Marx's theory of wages and its corollary, the theory of the increasing rate of exploitation, both start out from the same postulate: that the worker is completely reduced by capital to the status of an object (into a commodity)."[65] What is so dangerous in the second mistake is that it leads naturally to the (Leninist) assumption that the workers must be taught their own interest, that they are incapable of conducting knowledgeable struggles on their own behalf. This assumption becomes the foundation of a "bureaucratic politics" of the type that has characterized the Soviet Union.[66] As a consequence, there is little difference between bureaucratic "socialist" politics and bureaucratic capitalist

works of power in his discussion of pyramidal structures. The reason for his contrast of networks and pyramids derives more from his conception of power as essentially repressive than from his conception of social space. The idea of networks does not only underlie the anarchist conception of resistance, however; it also underlies its conception of what is to be resisted. Moreover, it is *because* what is to be resisted comes in the form of networks that resistance must do so too.[16]

There are many points in society at which power is exercised. Those points are not isolated; the fact that itinerancy is frowned upon in contemporary society is not unrelated to the fact that contemporary individual self-understanding is suffused with psychological themes. These two facts, in turn, are not unrelated to the fact that prison officials understand themselves to be engaged in a project more of rehabilitation than punishment. Foucault depicts the evolution of the relationships among these facts in Discipline *and* Punish. An analysis of the relationships, however, does not have to find among them a single source that would account for them. Matters may be much more fragilely connected than that: they may have to do with local conditions more than with any grand movements from which they could be said to emerge. Moreover, it may be the local conditions and the relationships that arise within them from which anything like a "grand movement" takes its sustenance; it may be that structures like those of capitalist economic relationships are the products as much as (or more than) they are the causes of local power relationships.

---

[63] Ibid., 2:227.

[64] In an appendix to "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," Castoriadis argues that Marx's argument for the falling rate of profit is based on the unjustified assumption that the growth of capital will outstrip the growth of surplus value (ibid., 2:318–19).

[65] Ibid., 2:256.

[66] Ibid, 2:258.

[16] Bakunin had many moments of understanding the network character of social space. In one of his criticisms of Marx's emphasis on the economic, he noted (perhaps unfairly but significantly for the anarchist perspective) that Marx "pays no heed to other elements in history, such as the effect—obvious though it is—of political, judicial, and religious institutions on the economic situation" (*Michael Bakunin: Selected* Writings, ed Arthur Lehning; trans. Steven Cox and Olive Stevens [London: Jonathan Cape, 1973]. p. 256).

plant management, prisons and, more recently, treatment of the ecosystem.[14] In some of their analyses, capitalism is seen as the overarching enemy; however, even those analyses remain distinguishable from their Marxist counterparts by focusing upon the specific mechanisms of oppression within the criticized context, while capitalism becomes a name for contemporary society more than a specifiable source of that context.

The picture of power and struggle that emerges in the anarchist perspective is one of intersecting networks of power rather than of a hierarchy. Concomitantly, anarchist struggle is conceived not in terms of substituting new and better hierarchies for the old ones, but in terms of getting rid of hierarchic thinking and action altogether. Colin Ward, a contemporary anarchist whose views closely parallel those of the poststructuralists, cites the intertwining of the conception of power and that of the nature of resistance this way:

> [W]e have to build networks instead of pyramids. All authoritarian institutions are organised as pyramids: the state, the private or public corporation, the army, the police, the church, the university, the hospital: they are all pyramidal structures with a small group of decision-makers at the top and a broad base of people whose decisions are *made for them* at the bottom. Anarchism does not demand the changing of the labels on the layers, it doesn't want different people on top, it wants us to clamber out from underneath.[15]

The anarchist picture of networks of power requires deepening; for instance, although Ward uses the metaphor of networks explicitly only when prescribing alternatives, he in fact describes net-

---

[14] Among contemporary anarchists, Murray Bookchin is the foremost example of an ecologically oriented anarchist. See, for instance, his *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose **Books,** 1989).

[15] Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (London: Allen& Unwin, 1973), p. 22.

politics; both have the effect of disempowering the workers in regard to the running of their lives.

Based on this analysis, Castoriadis makes his positive proposal, which constitutes the second part of the argument. If the Marxist assumption that the fundamental contradiction in capitalism is purely economic is wrong, that is not because there is no fundamental contradiction. The contradiction exists, and it lies at the core of modern, bureaucratic capitalism (including the state capitalism of the Soviet Union). What bureaucratic capitalism requires is the participation of the workers; the system cannot survive without it. But that participation, though required, is at the same time denied by the attempt to bar the workers from the decisionmaking processes in their sphere of work. While requiring the labor of the workers, capitalism, *by its very structure,* excludes the motivation workers would have to engage their labor. Thus, "The capitalist organization of society is contradictory in the same way that a neurotic individual is so: It can try to carry out its intentions only through acts that constantly thwart these same intentions."[67] This contradiction is played out at all levels of social life: in a politics that requires voting but excludes participation in the political process, in an ethical system that requires a work ethic but reduces economic life to exchange value, and so on.

The contradiction is materialized in the antagonism of two classes: those who direct and those who execute the production process. Thus Castoriadis returns to his earlier themes, this time without the Marxist cast. For him, the fundamental problem is not poverty but alienation: the worker is required to participate in a process that at the same time excludes him or her. Castoriadis claims that the problem of alienation is a historical one, not a matter of human essence. That claim is of questionable fit with the rest of his thought, however, for the workers' desire to participate in decision making that he posits does not seem to be

---

[67] Ibid, 2:259.

engendered by capitalism.[68] Whether based on an essentialism or not, though, what is required to overcome alienation is not money but participation. Workers must manage their own affairs, not only their private lives but their workplace and their political lives as well. In order to achieve this, there needs to be "a total movement concerned with everything people do in society and above all with their real daily lives."[69] The revolution, then, must be a revolution "from below," one whose goal is management rather than remuneration. The destruction of capitalism is most profoundly the destruction of the distinction between directors and executants. A socialist society is a society in which all are directors: economically, politically, and personally.

Castoriadis's later theory has much in common with the theorists of the Italian autonomy movement: an attempt to theorize from the perspective of the oppressed and, consequent upon this, an emphasis on direct participation rather than representative or vanguard politics; a recognition that needs and interests are diverse and irreducible; and a rejection of increasing immiseration as the criterion of class polarization. He goes one step farther toward anarchism, though, in rejecting outright the Marxist model as such, offering in its stead a more concrete analysis of worker discontent (alienation from self-management) than *autonomia,* which retained the concept of exploitation of surplus value as the explanation for worker discontent. Castoriadis's writing occupies a position at the limits of strategic analysis, suffused by a multiplicity and irreducibility that, though they inform his analysis, never force the text to abandon its single focus. For Castoriadis, the focus remains capitalism, and the proletariat (broadly defined, in a manner

questions strategic thinking, representation becomes a political impossibility; more profoundly, though, when one questions representation as a political and ethical concept, the ability to sustain strategic thinking becomes diminished, and a path opens leading toward another, tactical, political thinking.[11]

The anarchist rejection of representation and strategic political philosophy is an invitation to a widening of the field of politics. It is commonplace to regard the feminist slogan that the personal is political and the poststructuralist idea that politics is everywhere as truisms.[12] What must be recognised in these slogans, however, is that they imply not only that power operates across a broader terrain than that considered by traditional, particularly liberal, theorists. This recognition is retained, for instance, by the Critical Theorists, who nevertheless accounted for the expansiveness of power by reducing it to the emanation from a single source: capitalist economic relations. The widening of the political field of which anarchists, feminists, and poststructuralists speak is not only a quantitative widening, but a qualitative widening as well. Power not only intervenes in more places; its intervention is of different types. The affinity that many feminists have shown for anarchist thinking is no accident: the operations of patriarchy are more, and other, than just economic ones. They constitute a realm of oppression that requires distinct address.[13] In addition to the critique of patriarchy, anarchists have been drawn to critiques of psychotherapy,

---

[68] "There is no human nature" (ibid., 2:286). Castoriadis wants to argue that capitalism splits the person into two parts, only one of which is necessary for the production process. It is unclear, however, how capitalism could constitute the excluded part; there seems to be no need for the system to create it. Therefore, it seems to be a constant outside the capitalist system.

[69] Ibid., 2:230.

---

[11] Even Bakunin recognized, at moments, the different and irreducible, though interconnected, sources for the operation of power. His *God and the State,* for instance, in addition to citing religion and statehood as particular evils, addresses the dangers of a pervasive scientism in guiding human affairs (pp. 55–64).

[12] "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 1: An *Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley [New York: Random House, 1978], p. 93).

[13] For more on the affinity between anarchism and feminism, see Peggy Kornegger's article "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," in *Reinventing Anarchy,* ed. Ehrlich et al., pp. 237–49.

group, in movements of liberation as well as elsewhere, no matter the state of consciousness of entire social classes.[9]

Here the picture, more in accordance with anarchist thinking, is not so much one of a top and a bottom but, rather, one of a series of tops and bottoms that are perhaps interconnected but not subordinated. It will be seen below that the idea of "top and bottom" is rejected entirely by poststructuralists and that its rejection depends upon a reinterpretation of the workings of power: when one no longer conceives of power solely as oppressive, but also as productive, the image of top and bottom no longer captures its operation. The first crucial move away from this imagery which is at the core of strategic thought, however, was made by the anarchists in questioning the viability of any analysis that depends upon a center of power and that, consequently, admits of the possibility of representation in political struggle and re-formation.[10] It was the anarchists who brought to light the indissoluble link between strategic political thinking and representation. When one

---

[9] Wieck, "The Negativity of Anarchism" (1975), in *Reinventing Anarchy,* ed. Howard Ehrlich, Carol Ehrlich, David DeLeon, and Glenda Morris (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 141.

[10] It could be objected here that Marxism's center of power is not the same as its center of analysis: the analysis centers on economic exploitation, but the power center is often the state. This is what allows, within the Marxist tradition, for such disparate alternatives as the Leninist's appropriation of the state and the autonomy movement's subversion and rearrangement of economic mechanisms. The point is granted; however, to stop there neglects the Marxist emphasis, demonstrated in Chapter 2, above, that all struggle is directed toward changing the economic structure. Thus the question, for any Marxism worthy of the name, is: What needs to be done to change the economic structure into one in which exploitation does not occur? When this is recognized, the fact that power does not necessarily emanate from, or solely from, the economic core is a point that is subordinate to the necessity for struggle against the economic structure. This is emphasized even by Althusser, who, though arguing for the relative autonomy of the superstructure (as a justification for Lenin's "weakest link" theory), grounds it on the need for reproduction of the economic substructure.

---

similar to its definition by autonomia theorists), *as such,* remains the revolutionary force: "[T]here is no revolution without the proletariat, and the proletariat is the product of capitalist development. It is the very movement of capitalism that, in proletarianizing society, broadens … the basis of the socialist revolution."[70]

Thus, there remains for Castoriadis the single goal of eliminating a capitalism that is defined by a single crucial feature: the division between directors and executants. Other problems of oppression that he addresses—political, social, moral—all devolve upon the figure of alienation from self-management in social life. Were the reduction of oppression to this single feature to be questioned, then his analysis would pass over from a strategic to a tactical one. That is why he sounds at moments so close to the anarchists—for example, in his proposal for a federated society in which administrative power is delegated but political power is retained.[71] As will be seen, the themes he retains are the traditional anarchist ones that bring with them the danger of reversion into a strategic analysis, particularly an assumption (whether historical or, more likely, transcendental) about human beings and their needs. Like the anarchists. Castoriadis utilizes the notion of alienation to buttress his claim that the workers can be "trusted," that their needs and desires are legitimate and not chaotic. It will be argued in Chapter 4, below, that the assumption of the innocence of the oppressed, an assumption common to both Castoriadis and the anarchist movement in its traditional guise, is not anarchist enough.

History has not borne out Castoriadis's revolutionary predictions (although his claim that workers desire participation in decisionmaking has received more empirical support than claims about

---

[70] Ibid, 2:298. This claim should not be mistaken for a formalist analysis of the inevitability of revolution. In passages preceding this one. Castoriadis emphasized that there are no "objective" conditions for revolution. In his words, the conditions are neither "objective" nor "subjective," but "historical."

[71] For Castoriadis's concrete proposals, see "On the Content of Socialism," pt. 2, ibid., 2:108–49.

wanting to reappropriate surplus value). His strategic claims, like those of others in the Marxist tradition, have foundered against the reality they sought to influence. It is time, then, to investigate the direction in which his work, and to a lesser degree that of his contemporary Marxists, was headed: toward a tactical political philosophy. This investigation cannot assume that the failure of Marxist discourse indicates the bankruptcy of all strategic political philosophy. It is possible that there are other types of strategic thought, as yet unexamined, that would offer a more accurate mode of analysis and, just as urgent, a more viable set of recommendations. It is also possible that there are as yet untraveled paths within Marxism that might yield more benefit than those which have been taken. What has been presented here is no proof against strategic political philosophy. The legacy of Marxism, and the reasons for its demise—specifically the reductionism of its analyses combined with the failure of its revolutionary predictions—provide, not a refutation of strategic thinking, but an invitation to another kind of thinking. That other kind of thinking does exist, and has existed since before Marx wrote. Its history has been that of a suppressed alternative, an unacknowledged "third way" forced to subsist in the shadows of Marxism and liberalism. We turn now to the history of that thinking in an attempt to sketch, with its help, the outlines of a tactical political thought that retains the Marxists' ethical commitments while jettisoning the philosophy they constructed to realize them.

connotations but more widely as an attempt to wrest from people decisions about their lives. The political instance of this is only the most obvious, for it occurs on other planes as well: the ethical, the social, and the psychological, for instance. The effects of representation, as will be seen in Chapter 5, below, were not lost upon the poststructuralists; in fact, their political interventions deepen the critique of representation, including some representational elements that found their way into the core of traditional anarchist thought.

As a first approach, then, we may say that anarchist thinking occurs from the bottom up, rather than from the top down. "Top" and "bottom" imagery, however, offers only a limited understanding of anarchism; nonetheless, too many anarchists have engaged in it themselves (perhaps attempting to invert the thinking of the Marxist alternative). Bakunin, for instance, in a critique of Marx's views within the First International, wrote: "The State is the government from above downwards, by a minority, of an immense mass of men, extremely varied in their social positions, occupations, interests, and aspirations."[8] As the "experiments with socialism" in the twentieth century have unfolded, more recent anarchist thinkers have jettisoned the idea of a top and a bottom in favor of more decentralized imagery. According to contemporary anarchist David Wieck:

> Basic to Marxism is the view that economic power is the key to a liberation of which the power of a party, the power of government, and the power of a specific class are (or are to be) instruments. Basic to anarchism is the opposing view that the abolition of dominion and tyranny depends on their negation, in thought and when possible action, in every form and at every step, from now on, progressively, by every individual and

---

[8] Mikhail Bakunin, "Perils of the Marxist State," in *The Anarchist Reader*, ed. George Woodcock (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977), p. 141.

frage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interest of the immense majority in subjection to them."[5]

The crucial element in representation, then, is the transfer of power. In order for liberation to occur, individuals and groups must retain their power; they cannot cede it without risking the loss of the goal for which all political struggles occur: empowerment. For anarchists, the goal must be reflected in the process; otherwise, the permanent possibility of distorting the revolutionary process will be imminent. Leninist vanguardism is anathema to anarchists, precisely because it represents the ultimate form of representation. Some anarchists, most notably Proudhon, even resisted the immersion into any political activity at all, arguing that the moment one enters into political organizing one begins playing the very game that needs to be overcome; liberation arises through the construction of alternatives, not through the destruction or reformation of insupportable realities. "We must not suppose the *revolutionary* action is the means of social reform, because this so-called means would simply be an appeal to force, to arbitrariness, in short a contradiction," wrote Proudhon in a letter to Marx.[6]

The critique of representation in the anarchist tradition runs deeper than just political representation. Kropotkin, in an article on anarchist morality, wrote that respect for the individual implies that "we refuse to assume a right which moralists have always taken upon themselves to claim, that of mutilating the individual in the name of some ideal."[7] What motivates the critique of political representation is the idea that in giving people images of who they are and what they desire, one wrests from them the ability to decide those matters for themselves. Representation, in the anarchist tradition, must be understood not merely in its political

---

[5] Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 35.

[6] Quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*, p. 52.

[7] Peter Kropotkin, "Anarchist Morality," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets,* ed Roger N. Baldwin (New York: Dover, 1970), p. 105.

3. Anarchism

In September 1872, the International Working Men's Association, meeting at The Hague, voted to expel Mikhail Bakunin from its ranks. The expulsion was not unexpected, and Bakunin did not even attend the conference at which it was held. It would have seemed, several months before, an unlikely turn of events. Bakunin's support in the International was strong, perhaps even constituting a majority. But by the time of the conference at The Hague, it was a foregone conclusion that Bakunin's days with the International were numbered. Karl Marx, a member of the General Council (the central steering committee of the International), would have it no other way.

The dispute between Marx and Bakunin had been brewing for some time, and with increasing intensity since Bakunin joined the International in 1868. The events surrounding the Paris Commune in 1871 and the subsequent repression by the French government of supporters of the Commune lent an urgency to their dispute, although it had not lacked passion for several years before then. By 1871, Marx had decided that if the correct path of the International was to be sustained in the face of Bakunin's growing support, the General Council, of which Marx was a member, was required to act decisively, going to the limits of— perhaps even beyond—its administrative power. Among the resolutions it adopted was Resolution 15, which arrogated to itself the right to decide the time and place of the next full congress of the International. It chose The Hague in order to avoid having to confront Bakunin's strongholds in more natural sites for the congress, such as Geneva.

It is possible that Bakunin could have turned the tables on Marx at The Hague conference; however, schemer though he was, he was not a very proficient one. Furthermore, many of his allies, including the Italian section, decided to boycott the congress and to set up an alternative one. Since there was no coordination between Bakunin's supporters, the congress at The Hague was left open to Marx's followers. As it turned out, it would be the last significant meeting of what was to be called later the First International.[1]

By the time of the demise of the First International, the dispute between Marx and Bakunin had degenerated into little more than thinly disguised personal attacks, with Marx displaying his anti-Slavic prejudices and Bakunin reveling in his own anti-German and anti-Semitic leanings. The dispute that animated them, however, was far from personal. There was a fundamental difference between the two regarding how a radical social movement should be conceived and organized, and the relative positions that Bakunin and Marx occupied in the International embodied those differences. Marx carefully placed himself on the steering committee of the International for the purpose of molding its theoretical analysis and educating its members about the proper tactics and organization for working-class power. Bakunin used his charismatic personality in traveling around to different groups in different countries, more interested in roiling them to action than in determining the proper vehicle for that action. Bakunin felt that action would create its own proper vehicles. Further, he was against the centralization of power in the International (although he did, on occasion, vote to grant extra powers to the General Council, including, ironically, the power to expel members).[2] This last stand would later

_____

[1] For a detailed and balanced history of the Marx-Bakunin dispute in the First International, see Paul Thomas's *Karl Marx and the Anarchists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). pp. 300–329. For a less detailed, though more theoretically acute approach, see James Joll's The *Anarchists,* 2nd **ed,** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 79–96.

[2] Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, p. 309.

be ridiculed by Engels: "Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will on the other by means of rifles, bayonets, and cannon."[3]

It was not only the means of revolution that were at stake in the dispute. For Marx, the first goal of the revolution was the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only after the proletariat seized state power could there be any question of ending that power. For Bakunin, the state was precisely the problem. The centralization of power had to be abolished in all its forms. The charge leveled by Bakunin's followers in the Jura federation against the decisions taken in 1871 by the General Council was precisely that it reinstated the centralization of power: "The International, the embryo of future human society, must be from this moment the faithful image of our principles of liberty and federation, and reject from its midst any principle leading to authority and dictatorship."[4]

The rejection of centralization in an organization dedicated to producing "the embryo of future human society" is part of the larger, central theme of anarchism: the rejection of representation. What Bakunin and the Jura federation rejected in their dispute with Marx was representation on the political level. To the anarchists, political representation signifies the delegation of power from one group or individual to another, and with that delegation comes the risk of exploitation by the group or individual to whom power has been ceded. It is a mistake to view the anarchist diatribes against the state as the foundation for its critique of representation. The state is the object of critique because it is the ultimate form of political representation, not because it is founding for it. Bakunin, defining "the sense in which we are really Anarcrusts," wrote that "we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suf-

_____

[3] Quoted in Joll, *The Anarchists*, p. 92.
[4] Quoted ibid., p. 87.

is false, or at best implausible. To talk about representing the interests of others as though those interests were either natural or given, even in the unfolding of a historical destiny, is simply to be mistaken in one's view of what people are like: it is to commit the error of humanism. However, as the poststructuralists recognize, this error is not politically neutral. Bound to the epistemic error is a political significance, one whose consequences have played themselves out over the course of the past two centuries of Western history. Micropolitical analysis, if it is not to fall into epistemological and political inconsistency (or worse), must reject the attempt to explain the victims of various oppressions to themselves and must content itself with talking to them about how their situation arose. "In my opinion," Deleuze once told Foucault in conversation, "you were the first—in your books and in the practical sphere—to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others."[24]

If the genealogical perspective is right, then neither genealogy nor any micropolitical analysis can claim for itself a privileged position above the social network. It can be, at best, a more or less general analysis of our situation and perhaps in addition—though here much more modestly and carefully—a set of tentative suggestions for its resolution or escape. If it is the latter (which Foucault mostly avoided and Deleuze and Lyotard mostly did not), it must be modest because although it can offer another set of possibilities and perhaps a route to them, it cannot do so under the guise of representing the interests of victims to themselves. Indeed, it cannot even represent them to themselves as victims if they do not share the ethical commitments that infuse the genealogical analysis. Further, those suggestions must be tentative in that all politics is a matter of practices and power, both of which are contingent and may turn out to create a situation worse than the one from

---

[24] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" (1972), in *Language, Counter-Memory. Practice, p.* 209.

same: people naturally tend to their affairs in ways that are helpful to themselves and to others and that are not, or mostly not, harmful or destructive. Anarchism, then, is imbued with a type of essentialism or naturalism that forms the foundation of its thought. People are naturally good; if the obstacles to that goodness are removed—specifically, the twin evils of representation and power—then they will realize and express that goodness in their activity. Representation distorts goodness by allowing another or others to tell one who one is and what one wants, rather than allowing those qualities to emerge naturally. Power suppresses one's goodness for the sake of interests that may very well be destructive.

Anarchism's naturalism in positing a human essence contains within it an insight—though not a naturalist one—that will prove crucial for understanding poststructuralist political philosophy. The point of anarchism's resort to the idea of a benign human essence is to be able to justify its resistance to power. Suppose that anarchists had a different view of power, one that saw power not solely as suppressive but also as productive: power not only suppresses actions, events, and people, but creates them as well. In that case, it would be impossible to justify the resistance to all power; one would have to distinguish clearly acceptable creations or effects (as opposed, in the case of the suppressive assumption, to exercises) of power from unacceptable ones. This distinguishing could not occur on the basis of a humanist naturalism, because power can be seen as creating what goes under the name "human essence" as well as suppressing it. Rather, the distinguishing would have to occur in more strictly ethical terms. It will be seen that the poststructuralist perspective requires precisely this kind of ethical discourse in order to realize its political theory, although, as with political theory generally, a poststructuralist ethics does not by itself found the theory but, rather, interacts with the political and social context to codetermine it.

In this light, we can recognize that anarchism's naturalist view of human beings plays an ethical role in its political theory. As

such, and taken by itself, it moves anarchism more toward a purely ethical stand than toward a political one. However, as has been seen, the case is more complicated than that. For anarchism also carries within it the possibility of local and multiple analyses that resist reduction either to the strategic, on the one hand, or to the ought- or is-pole, on the other. Moreover, as anarchists like Colin Ward have demonstrated, it is possible to hold an anarchist perspective with a view that power is essentially suppressive, but without having a commitment to a human essence. Within such a perspective, federalism could only be treated as a tactic: "The anarchist alternative is that of fragmentation, fission rather than fusion, diversity rather than unity, a mass of societies rather than a mass society."[41] In any case, an explanation for anarchism's humanist naturalism may lie in its offering a justification—although it is not the only one possible—for the resistance to all power.

Moreover, the naturalist justification allows anarchists to assume their ethics rather than having to argue for them. If the human essence is already benign, then there is no need to articulate what kinds of human activity are good and what kinds are bad; those kinds of human activity unhampered by power and representation are good, while those kinds that are so hampered are—or at least are in danger of being—bad. "[W]e are persuaded that the great majority of mankind, in proportion to their degree of enlightenment and the completeness with which they free themselves from existing fetters will behave and act always in a direction useful to society," wrote Kropotkin.[42] While anarchists like Emma Goldman resisted the naturalist path (in an echo of Nietzsche, who was founding for poststructuralist thought, she called for "a *fundimental transvaluation of values"),*[43] the fundamental drift of anarchism has been toward the assumption

---

[41] Ward, *Anarchy in* Action, p. 52.
[42] Kropotkin, "Anarchist Morality." p. 102.
[43] In *The Anarchist Reader,* ed. Woodcock, p. 159.

ate extraordinary words, on condition that they be put to the most ordinary use and that the entity they designate be made to exist in the same way as the most common object.")[23]

If we and our practices consist of little lines or partial objects, which the genealogical method unravels theoretically, then political intervention must be along or across these lines and the intersections they form. That is why it is a micropolitics. But, since the network of social/political relationships within which micropolitical interventions take place is not a uniform one—power is not exercised to the same degree at all points and, moreover, one would not call all exercises of power oppressive—it would be a mistake to claim that all micropolitical interventions are of equal worth. After all, the same degree, kind, or acceptability of power is not involved when parents instruct their children on how to avoid poisons as is involved when teachers inculcate beliefs of natural superiority according to race or nationality. What poststructuralist analysis offers (and we will examine several examples of it below) are theoretical interventions into nodes and intersections of particular importance. One must understand, however, that these theoretical interventions are not meant to serve as representations to the victims of certain oppressive practices of who they really are, but as analyses of their situation, as tools to be used—if indeed they prove useful, or even desirable—in overcoming that oppression. Micropolitical theory, like traditional anarchist theory, seeks to stand alongside micropolitical practice, not to represent it to itself. Theory does not exist outside of practice; it, too, is a practice.

The antirepresentational character of poststructuralist micropolitics occurs along two registers, one epistemic and the other political. The epistemic attack on representation we have already seen. It consists in the denial that people have a nature or a natural set of interests that their political liberation will allow them to express or fulfill. At this level, representation is not oppressive; rather, it

---

[23] Ibid, p.3.

119

be the idea of a totality, or of the unity, of a body. It can only be the idea of a multiplicity or a diversity.[21]

"[T]he question," writes Deleuze, "of schizoanalysis or pragmatics, micro-politics itself, never consists in interpreting, but merely in asking what are your lines, individual or group, and what are the dangers on each."[22] The lines Deleuze refers to here are those forces or practices which determine the practices one engages in, and the desires and selfidentifications one possesses. We, our practices and ourselves, are, as seen above, the product of what Deleuze calls different "lines": segmentary lines, molecular lines, and lines of flight. What we do is determined by these lines and by the intersections they form with other lines. De*leuze* does not always speak in terms of lines, but his perspective remains the same. When, for instance with Guattari, he speaks of desiringmachines that are (using Melanie Klein's terminology) "partial objects," and claims that the search for the whole object is misplaced because machinic connections happen between partial objects, he is merely using other concepts to make the same point within another context. (Deleuze offers the key to understanding the often bewildering array of concepts he invokes in Dialogues when he writes: "You can always replace one word with another. If you don't like that one, if it doesn't suit you, take another, put another in its place... Let us cre-

[21] Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud. Just Gaming, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 93–94. It should be noted that in Lyotard's transitional period between *Economic libidmale* and *The Differend,* he seems at times to vacillate in his interpretation of postmodernism, seeing it sometimes as a description of our situation and sometimes as a prescription for allaying the problems of our situation. The latter interpretation would correspond more closely with traditional anarchism's more strategic tendencies. I have chosen to interpret Lyotard in the former way, both because the perspective he arrives at in *The Differend* is clearly more in line with it and because the bulk of his work, even during the transitional period of the late 1970s and the early 1980s leans toward it.
[22] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Hahberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 143.

of a human essence that is benign, rendering moot the necessity to offer an ethical account of itself (and as well the necessity to untangle the complex web of relationships that binds ethics and representation, a point to which our final chapter will return).

The motivation for the turn toward naturalism, however, derives not from theoretical laziness on the part of anarchists, but from the assumption that power is exclusively suppressive in its operation. It is the encompassing scope of this assumption about power that, like the scope of capitalism under the Critical Theorists, incites the search for a transcendental or quasi-transcendental ground from which to recover a pure, untainted source for resistance. The crucial difference from the Critical Theorists lies not in their assumptions about power, nor in their reponse to that assumption, but in the fact that such an assumption does not dominate the anarchist perspective in the way it does the Critical Theorists'. There is another thought that is opened up in anarchism, a thought that, followed along a path free from the assumption of power as suppressive, leads to a political philosophy that is thoroughly multiple and diverse: a tactical political philosophy.

Both their view of power as suppressive and their humanist naturalism steer the anarchists away from their insights into the reductionism of Marxist analysis. As has been seen, these assumptions tilt the appropriation of anarchist federalism and state power toward a strategic reading rather than a tactical one. These twin assumptions can be called the *a priori* that haunts anarchist thought. They are *a priori* because they are not derived from anarchist analysis of their political context, but are assumed from outset. We have seen that they "haunt" rather than "determine" anarchist thought, because, in contrast to Marxism, much of the current of that thought runs counter to such *a* priori assumptions. The *a priori* of anarchist thought is a strategic pair of assumptions that imposes itself on anarchism from the outside, rather than determining its direction from within. That anarchism can survive the abandonment of humanist naturalism we have seen from the

case of Colin Ward's perspective: for him, strategic thought and its effects on the world are reason enough for a tactical alternative, without the assumption of a benign human essence. No political philosophy calling itself anarchism, however, has been articulated without the suppressive assumption regarding power There is an *a priori* guiding all anarchist philosophy, though it may be thinner or fuller, depending on the theorist.

The question about the source of anarchism's humanist naturalism, then, is replaced by the larger question of the source of anarchism's *a priori,* a question that itself is inextricable from the question of the strategic intrusion into its thought. Why does anarchism, which seemed to articulate an alternative to Marxism not just by adopting another strategic standpoint but instead by abandoning strategy altogether, turn against its own foundations (or, perhaps, misread its own foundations) in so profound a way? Why, as it reaches the threshold of a truly tactical philosophy—that is, an alternative political thought not only to Marxism but to Marxism's guiding picture of political space as a hierarchy or a set of concentric circles—does it back away? In fact, the strategic assumptions that haunt anarchism are far more implausible than those guiding Marxism. How could its thought go so far astray?

The answer to these questions, if the idea that the motivation for thinking in certain ways—especially in political matters—is itself political, should receive an answer from within political theory, rather than outside it. What must be asked, if the move away from strategic to tactical political philosophy is to be completed successfully, are two intertwined questions: How do the assumptions that power is suppressive and that human beings have a benign essence operate politically, and How can a tactical political philosophy avoid them? The first question will be the subject of the next chapter, and the second the subject of the chapter after that.

status of those values—are crucial to any general account of it; they will form the subject matter of the next chapter. What we must recognize here is their place and effect on the genealogical project of poststructuralist political thought.

The kind of politics that genealogy yields is a politics that is more local and diffuse than the large-scale politics that is better suited to grand narratives. Genealogy promotes resistance at the diffuse points at which practices occur, intersect, and give rise to oppressive relations. It struggles not only on the economic or state levels, but on the epistemological, psychological, linguistic, sexual, religious, psychoanalytic, ethical, informational (etc.) levels as well. It struggles on these levels not because multiple struggles will create a society without the centralization of power, but because power is not centralized, because across the surface of those levels are the sites at which power arises. If genealogy traces the political formation of social objects that we take for granted as natural and neutral, the politics that issues from it must inevitably be a politics of diffusion and multiplicity, a politics that confronts power in a variety of irreducible and often surprising places. In short, the politics to which genealogy gives birth must be a micropolitics. As Lyotard observes:

> [I]fone has the viewpoint of a multiplicity of language games, if one has the hypothesis that the social bond is not made up of a single type of statement, or, if you will, of discourse, but that it is made up of several types of these games, of which a certain number is known, then it follows that, to put it quickly, social partners are caught up in pragmatics that are different from each other ... And the idea that I think we need today in order to make decisions in political matters cannot

politics, then genealogy is not a matter solely of gaining knowledge about the history of objects; the question must also be posed concerning which knowledge one will have. That is why Deleuze claims that for Nietzsche the urgent question to be asked is not the traditional metaphysical one "What is … ?" but, rather, "Which one?"[18] Which force is it, active or reactive, and which quality of the will to power, affirmative or negative, has taken hold of an object? It is also why Deleuze and Guattari suggest in *Anti-Oedipus* that we stop asking the question "What does it signify?" and ask instead "What does it produce? What can it be used for?"[19] Those are the genealogical questions, and they are always double, applied not only to the object of genealogy but to genealogy itself. Which is why genealogy is inescapably ethical, a knowledge conjoined with a value or set of values: a "critique," a "curative science."

Another way of putting the point is that genealogy recognizes itself to be part of the tension articulated at the outset of the present essay between the is- and the ought-pole of political philosophy. Genealogy recognizes that its knowledge is value-laden and contextually situated, just as its values are inseparable from the context in which they emerge: a context that includes a certain epistemological arrangement, what Foucault has called a "regime of truth."[20] Genealogy performs its tasks not from above the political realm, surveying it at a safe distance from its struggles. It is instead part of those struggles, and the knowledge it provides, while still purporting to be true, is itself encrusted in the political realm, an object for the shifting play of dominations of which history is made. Thus, the articulation of poststructuralism's political values—and, more important, the metaethical and epistemological

---

and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

[18] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* pp. 75–76.

[19] This substitution is recommended throughout Anti-Oedipus, but it first appears on p. 3.

[20] Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *Power/Knowledge,* p. 131.

4. The Positivity of Power and the End of Humanism

> [I]f it is true that the juridical system was useful for representing, albeit in a nonexhaustive way, a power that was centered primarily around deduction and death, it is utterly incongruous with the new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed at all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.[1]

That power is always a matter of constraints upon action does not imply that we must define those *con*straints in terms of *re*straints. The "juridico-discursive" model of power, as Foucault calls it, mistakenly cites the dominant mode of the operation of power several centuries ago as the model for all operations of power.[2] What we have called the "suppressive assumption" regarding power, if appropriate to under standing a certain historical period, is mistaken when it is taken to be the definition of power rather than one of its modes of enactment.[3] Moreover, our

---

[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 89.

[2] Ibid., 1:82.

[3] That power is ever rightly understood as juridical, and that Foucault thought it ever was, is disputed by Gilles Deleuze in his book on Foucault: "We might at first glance think that the diagram is reserved for modern societies: *Discipline and Punish* analyses the disciplinary diagram in so far as it replaces the

continuing to think of power "juridically" or "suppressively" is not merely a mistaken view of power; it is not merely an epistemological problem. It, like many epistemological concerns, is a political concern as well. If the poststructuralists have spent so much time focusing on the interaction between power and knowledge, it is because they recognize that much of what we say we know is not independent of the power relationships in which we are enmeshed and, in fact, is partially a product of those relationships. In this, they can be said to take seriously the Marxist concept of ideology, although they remove it from its subordination to the economic substructure. If the poststructuralists are right, then the suppressive assumption about power is a politically significant fact, as is the blindness the anarchists displayed by endorsing it.

For Deleuze, knowledge is always an effect; it comes afterward. What is primary are relationships among forces. Across the entirety of the Deleuzian corpus runs the assumption, first articulated in his early book on Nietzsche, that "the history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence offorces which struggle for possession."[4] What constitutes a force in Deleuze's thought changes with his texts or, better, with the subject matter of those texts. In his book on Nietzsche, there are active forces and reactive forces; in *Anti-Oedipus,* there are forces of desire (which is conceived as producing, not lacking) and social forces; in his book on Foucault, there are forces of power. In all cases, though, what is crucial about forces is their division into those which are, in some sense, life-affirming and those which

---

effects of the old sovereign regime with a control that is immanent to the social field. But this is not at all the case; it is each stratified historical formation that refers back to a diagram offorces as though it were its outside" (*Foucault,* trans. Sean Hand [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988], p. 84). It seems to me that this perspective is more Deleuzian than Foucauldian, as Deleuze was drawn to more transcendental analyses and Foucault to more historical ones.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and* Philosophy, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 3.

perspective: there could be no scientific proof that science was the only legitimate form of knowledge. Thus, it founded itself either on the Enlightenment narrative of human emancipation from superstition, religion, and tyranny or on the Hegelian speculative narrative of Spirit realizing itself in its unfolding.

These narratives, which Lyotard labels "modern" or "grand" narratives, are, however, falling apart as we enter a new, "postmodern" era of suspicion toward grand narratives.[15] Part of the suspicion against the grand narratives that have founded scientific knowledge comes, ironically, from science itself. The indeterminacy of recent physics, Godel's theorem, and related scientific discoveries are "producing not the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy."[16] Thus, the practice of science, though once intersecting with a politics of hegemony and capitalist domination, is now developing in a direction that may support a different type of politics, based not upon reducibility but upon difference: an anarchist politics, a politics of decentered power and resistance. Although Lyotard does not say so, the politics he outlines parallels (though it sees its emergence at a more recent date) Foucault's analysis in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* of the change from juridico-discursive power to a more dispersed, productive power.

Knowledge, then, like other social objects, is a matter of struggle and domination; and that includes the knowledge that genealogies can provide.[17] But if knowledge is bound up with values and

---

¹⁵ Ibid., p. xxiii.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁷ This does not mean that knowledge is untrue or an illusion, but rather that its truth or falsity is not the end of the matter. There is a political problem to be addressed as well, which is the project of genealogy. **That** something can be true as well as politically charged is not always understood by the poststructuralists; thus, at moments—and **"Nietzsche, Genealogy,** History" is one of them—they lapse into a self-refuting epistemological relativism. But this relativism is not necessary to their perspective. For more on this issue, see my *Between Genealogy*

or bracketing desire and influence is founded on the assumption that consciousness can somehow render itself transparent to itself, in order to cleanse itself of the will and outside constraint, and thus can reflect the object to be known in a "clear and distinct" manner. This assumption of transparency is, as has been seen, part of the idea of a subjective essence whose goal is to understand and realize itself, and as such is bound to the humanist program poststructuralism has jettisoned.[12]

If, however, poststructuralism has abandoned the idea of knowledge as a neutral substance, still it has recognized that the idea has had, and continues to have, political effects, effects all the more telling because of the mantle of political impartiality in which it cloaks itself. We have already seen the place of the politics of knowledge in Foucault's accounts of power/knowledge and Deleuze's Nietzschean critique of consciousness. One of the most sustained attempts to address the political effects of knowledge, though, is Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*.[13] In it, he describes the emergence of scientific knowledge as a dominant mode of understanding the world, a mode whose political effects included that of denigrating other modes of knowledge by imposing the requirement that in order to qualify as knowledge, a discourse had to conform to the norms of rigorous proof, purely denotative utterances, and performative efficiency. These requirements converged with the capitalist political project of domination over nature and others: "An equation between wealth, efficiency, and knowledge is thus established."[14] However, scientific knowledge could not eliminate other forms of narrative knowledge, because it could not legitimate itself through its own

are life-denying.[5] And in all cases, what is crucial about knowledge is that it is always the result of a complex of forces. What we must come to grips with, if we are to understand our world, are the forces that constitute us and our knowledge, rather than the knowledge that is merely a product of those forces.

The objection might be raised to Deleuze here that if knowledge is seen as a product offorces, doesn't this preclude at the outset any knowledge of those forces? And if so, hasn't Deleuze fallen into a self-refuting epistemological relativism (how could he *know* that knowledge itself is constituted by forces outside it)? Deleuze avoids this objection by distinguishing knowledge from "thought": knowledge is a product of forces, but thought is the attempt to understand those forces. Remarking on Foucault's historical works, Deleuze says: "Thought thinks its own history (the past), but in order to free itself from what it thinks (the present) and be able finally to 'think otherwise' (the future)."[6] The difference between thought and knowledge is that knowledge is a set of sedimented practices that devolve upon relations offorce, while thought is the subversion of that sedimentation through the process of articulating the relations offorce that constitute it. Thus, both thought and knowledge can offer us justified beliefs. Thought, however, describes the source of those specific beliefs that we have called knowledge in nonepistemic terms (which, as we shall see, does not mean that the source lies "outside" of knowledge) and thus brings us a new set of beliefs that in turn will become sedimented and in need of new thought.[7]

---

[12] It is also bound to a way of conceiving consciousness that derives from Descartes and that has been abandoned not only in Continental philosophy but in Anglo-American philosophy as well since its "linguistic turn."

[13] Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[14] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. 45.

---

[5] For more on this, see my "The Politics of Life in theThought of Gilles Deleuze," Sub, *Stance20,* no- 3 (1991): 24–35.

[6] Deleuze, *Foucault,* p. 119. It is in this chapter, "Foldings, or the Inside of Thought (Subjectivation)," that Deleuze, relying some on Maurice Blanchot, makes most clearly his distinction between knowledge and thought.

[7] It is not clear that Deleuze can always avoid the charge of a self-defeating relativism. He offers, for instance, an analysis of language in *The Logic of Sense* (trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990]) that holds meaning to be a relationship between what is "inside" language

114

87

What this perspective entails, and what has consequently become the core of Deleuze's project, is the following: 1) that we must seek the foundations of many of our beliefs not from within them but from a perspective that puts them in doubt; and 2) that we must evaluate those beliefs not on the basis of whether they are true or false but on the basis of whether or not they are life-affirming (or, in the language of AntiOedipus, whether they are "useful," whether they "work").[8] Regarding the *a priori* of any philosophy, then, Deleuze would ask what forces constitute that *a priori* and how we are to evaluate those forces.

Such a perspective questions the assumption that power is essentially suppressive. Deleuze, in his work with Guattari, offers a different idea of the operation of power. At first glance, it might seem that the division made between desire and the social in which desire is encrusted is a return to the traditional anarchist paradigm: "There is only desire and the social, and nothing else."[9] The appearance given by this statement is that desire, which Deleuze and Guattari valorize as a creative force, is opposed to the social, which limits and oppresses it as a suppressive power. Indeed, the description of the social as that which sees to it that desire is "dammed up, channeled, regulated" and the seeming valorization of "deterritorialization" against the social's attempt at "reterritorialization" would reinforce such a reading.[10] However, matters are not so simple. The key question for Deleuze and Guattari is how desire can

_____

and what is "outside" it. This raises the question of what kind of access we have to the outside of language and, more important, how we can talk about it. For more on this, see my "Difference and Unity in Gilles Deleuze," in Gilles *Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy,* ed. Constantin Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routlege, 1994).

 [8] "Given a certain effect, what machine is capable of producing it? And given a certain machine, what can it be used for?" (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism *and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane [New York: Viking Press, 1977], p. 3).

 [9] Ibid, p. 29.

 [10] Ibid., p. 33.

essary progress or goal.[7] The method of descent and emergence views history as an anonymous play of forces or practices in which the stakes are often shifting (both because of the contingency of events and because power not only suppresses objects but creates new ones that can form new stakes) and the end point nonexistent. Thus, "As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of an historical development."[8]

Genealogy is a historical account of its object, one that holds history to be contingent, dispersed, shifting, and without a goal. It is, in Deleuze's words, "an empirical and pluralist art."[9] Moreover, intrinsic to the genealogical method is the process of what Deleuze calls "critique"[10] and what Foucault calls a "curative science."[11] To see why this is so, we must recall that knowledges too have their history, their series of appropriations and reappropriations. Practices of knowledge are also the objects and subjects of struggle and resistance, and thus it is a mistake to view knowledge as value-free or power-free. Knowledge, like other social practices, has its genealogical descent and emergence. This fact has formed the basis for much of contemporary poststructuralist analysis and intervention.

The reason poststructuralism has focused so much of its theoretical energies on the politics of knowledge is that knowledge tends mistakenly to be thought of as distinct from political considerations. This mistake is not unrelated to the humanist project, because it consists in identifying knowledge as a neutral substance that is discovered when one removes oneself from the blinders of desire and political influence. The project of removing oneself from

_____

 [7] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p. 148.

 [8] Ibid.

 [9] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 76.

 [10] Ibid., chap. 3, esp. p. 87

 [11] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p. 156.

For Deleuze, there is another mistake bound up with the search for unitary origins. Such a search precludes the type of subtle evaluation of an object that is required for its proper appropriation. Often the forces that take hold of an object are of different kinds— in Nietzschean terms, they are both "active" and "reactive"—and the attempt to posit origins as singular rather than disparate precludes in advance the kind of evaluation that would take account of these different forces. This last point is crucial, because the place of an object (in our case a practice) in the social network is rarely a simple matter; there are other practices or potential practices with respect to which it may be oppressive or repressive, while it may foster or reinforce still others that may themselves be worth endorsing. Evaluation, then, is a painstaking project of evaluating the object of critique in relation to other objects with which it is entwined, and as well a matter of evaluating those other objects. The Uinits of such evaluation are practical rather than theoretical. Thus, the end of genealogical evaluation, like its beginnings, is disparate rather than unified.

In place of the search for a unitary origin, Nietzsche's genealogy, according to Foucault, substitutes the double method of *Herkunft* and *Enstehung:* "descent" and "emergence." Descent operates with the recognition that the unity of an object is the product of a dispersion of singular events. Thus, descent traces the coming together of these events in order to form an object that has come to appear as a unified and complete whole. As Deleuze and Guattari comment regarding the genesis of desire, "Disjunctions are the form that the genealogy of desire assumes."[6] Emergence is the complement to descent. It traces the "hazardous play of dominations" of historical forces, the play of appropriation and subversion of some practices, objects, or forces by others, a play that is without nec-

come to desire its own repression, and to that question comes the reply: "[T]he powers which crush desire, or which subjugate it, themselves already form part of the assemblages of desire."[11] Thus, desire is implicated in its own oppression, and to speak of a benign essence standing opposed to a force that blocks or suppresses it is to substitute a hierarchic and strategic picture of the social field for a nonreductive and tactical one: "Desire is a mixture, a blend, to such a degree that bureaucratic or fascist pieces are still or already caught up in revolutionary agitation."[12] The question that motivates Anti-Oedipus is not how to free desire from its repression by the social, but rather how to decide which investments of desire are revolutionary and which are reactionary. This question, as noted in Chapter 6, below, is one of ethics, not essences; and in this sense Foucault was precisely correct to call *Anti-Oedipus* "a book of ethics."[13]

For Deleuze and Guattari, power does not suppress desire; rather, it is implicated in every assemblage of desire. Otherwise put, if a thing is constituted by the forces that take it up, those forces should be seen as immanent, not transcendent, to that which is appropriated by them. (Here we have used interchangeably the concept of power and that of force. If power is interpreted as nonsuppressive, then the distinction between the two in Deleuze's work becomes effaced. To say that there are forces of desire or forces that are life-affirming is the same as saying that there are desiring or life-affirming powers.)[14] The picture here is of a network

[6] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 13.

[11] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habbeijam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). p. 133.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature,* trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 60

[13] In his preface to Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus, p. xui

[14] The distinction between life-affirming powers and life-negating ones is claimed by both Deleuze and his friend Antonio Negri to be traceable back to Spinoza's distinction between *potestas* and *potentia.* See Deleuze's *Expressionism in* Philosophy: Spinoza, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), pp. 102,218. Also, see Negri's *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics*

offorces or powers that interact to yield the world (especially the political world) in which we live—or, more accurately, which we are. Deleuze's abandonment of the traditional anarchist picture of the operation of power offers a new picture, both of politics and the social world, one that requires an analysis of each "assemblage of desire" on its own terms, rather than a valorizing of one type of assemblage. "Still, it is in concrete social fields, at specific moments, that the comparative movements of deterritorialization, the continuums of intensity and the combinations of flux that they form must be studied."[15] In this sense, Deleuze is correct when he says (and this could have been said of Foucault or Lyotard with equal justice): "I have always felt that I am an empiricist, that is, a pluralist."[16]

Before turning to the question of why the juridical or suppressive assumption about power has dominated political thought, it is worth seeing how Foucault views power, for he both converges with and diverges from Deleuze in his analysis. His divergence is in approaching power empirically rather than metaphysically. This approach reflects not merely a difference in the level of analysis, but a substantive philosophical difference as well. "All my analyses," he once said in an interview, "are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence."[17] Whereas Deleuze tries to offer a metaphysical foundation for his political analyses, albeit one that supports a tactical political philosophy, Foucault thinks the best way to tactics is to avoid metaphysics altogether. In his works after *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* he does this fairly assiduously, although there remain brief times when he sounds more

both in the libidinal analysis of *Economie libidinale* and in the agonistics of *The Differend.* As a form of political analysis, one that recognizes the positivity of power and the exhaustion of the humanist project, genealogy can be considered the anarchist method *parexcellence.*

"Genealogy," wrote Foucault in his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," "is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times."[3] Genealogy seeks to trace the emergence of its object, be it a discourse, a practice, or a concept. In such seeking, however, it does not look for a unitary origin, a single source from which its object springs. In another text, Foucault says that genealogy is "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history."[4] As with the subject, so with structure or any idea to which the complexity and multiplicity of history is reduced. To look for the sole origin is, according to Foucault, to make three mistakes. First, it is to assume that there are essences behind appearances, an assumption that runs counter to the picture of social relations as an irreducible network. Second, it is to see historical beginnings as grand affairs, when they are more often lowly and dispersed. Last, it is to import a notion of truth into beginnings: the origin of an object is its truth, its moment of transparency to itself.[5]

and Politics, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), esp. pp. 69–72.

[15] Deleuze and Parnet, Dialogues, p. 135.

[16] Ibid., "Preface to the English Language Edition," p. vii.

[17] "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Technologies of the Self,* ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 11.

[3] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1971), in *Language, Counter-Memory,* Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard; trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 139.

[4] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon. 1980), p. 117.

[5] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," pp. 142–44.

entails a layer of unconscious determination of practices that serves to hide the ends of those practices from their actors.

None of these reasons argues that practices are necessarily opaque from all reflection; rather, they support the more modest claim that if history is to be understood as a more or less contingent intersection of practices, then the effect of a single practice is not reducible to the goal of the actors engaging in that practice. Understanding the effects of practices is a matter for reflection and study, often both historical and philosophical. However, this picture is complicated when we recognize that practices of knowledge are also among the social practices and are not immune from the kind of interplay this picture describes. Thus, practices of knowledge may intersect with and serve purposes other than that of comprehending a field of inquiry. This raises the question of whether the answers offered within that field of inquiry are of more epistemological or political import. As Foucault put it, "[I]t is not the activity of a subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge."[2]

The poststructuralists, especially Foucault and Deleuze, have turned to Nietzsche's genealogical method in order to articulate the intersection of social practices that are also practices of power. Nowhere, perhaps, has the influence of Nietzsche upon poststructuralist political thought been so strong as in the area of genealogy. The influence of The *Genealogy of Morals* on both *Nietzsche and Philosophy* and *Discipline and Punish*, which can be read as philosophical and historical rewritings of the Genealogy, respectively, is palpable. Even Lyotard's work, though he did not appropriate the genealogical method as such, shows its influence

essentialist than he seems to want. Thus, Foucault tries to offer an "analytics of power" rather than a "theory of power,"[18] because "if one tries to erect a theory of power one will always be obliged to view it as emerging at a given place and time and hence to deduce it, to reconstruct its genesis."[19]

Foucault offers an analytic of the operation of power in the modern period. His most sustained treatment of the general characteristics of that operation is in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality,* where he advances four "propositions" on modern power: 1) that "it is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations"; 2) that "relations of power are not in a position of exteriority to other types of relationships"; that 3) "power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompass ing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix"; and 4) that "power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective."[20] These propositions form the basis of what could be called an "anarchist" view of power. Further, their historically bound character avoids the attempt to raise anarchism to the status of a theory for all times, thus reinforcing the recognition that political philosophy happens within and takes account of the context of its articulation. Moreover, though not metaphysically drawn, the contours of this anal-

---

[2] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 28.

[18] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 1:82.

[19] Foucault, The Confession of the Flesh" (1977), in *Power/Knowledge,* ed. *Colin* Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 199.

[20] Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 1:94. I believe that Foucault's use of the term "intentional" has been the cause of some misunderstandings about his idea of power and, at times, a source of confusion to him. The term "oriented" would serve his purpose better, since it is free of any subjectivist ring that would align him more closely with functionalism than he needs to be. For another discussion of the general characteristics of power in the modern epoch, see Foucault, "Powers and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge,* pp. 141–42, See also my *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the* Thought *of Michel* Foucault (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), chap. 6.

ysis parallel Deleuze's analysis of force relations and thus form a basis for the convergence in political philosophy between them.

Inseparable from this analytics of power is the idea, insisted on by both Foucault and Deleuze, that power does not merely suppress its objects; it creates them as well. We will see in Chapter 5, below, Foucault's tracing of the creation of the psychological subject, and the political significance of this creation. But, in more general terms, if power is conceived as operating not upon its objects but within them, not "from above" but "from below," not outside other relationships but across them, this entails that power is not a suppressive force but a creative one, giving rise not only to that which must be resisted but also, and more insidiously, to the forms resistance itself often takes. That is what makes specific political analysis necessary: if power creates its own resistance, then the liberation from specific forms of power must take account of the kind of resistance that is being engaged in, on pain of repeating that which one is trying to escape.

Therein lies the importance of the relationships between power and knowledge. Foucault does not try, as Deleuze does, to ground knowledge metaphysically in power. However, his analyses of the specific relationships between the two make plain that much of what passes for crucial areas of knowledge in our culture is inseparable from relations of power which that knowledge reinforces: "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."[21] In his three volumes on the history of sexuality, Foucault demonstrates that the "knowledge" one has of oneself as a sexual being is inseparable from the social order in which one finds oneself. For instance, the Greek knowledge of the human body—as engaging finite and expendable forces and requiring a balance between excess and chastity—was confluent with practices of self-mastery and mastery of one's household, and ultimately of the

---

[21] Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge,* p. 93.

A second reason for the lack of transparency of the consequences of practices to their actors is that they are often caused by practices unknown to the actors engaging in them. This reason is a corollary of the first, because if practices can intersect to yield other practices, those other practices may be fulfilling goals of the initial practices of which participants in the resulting practice may be unaware. Lyotard's description, in *The Postmodern Condition,* of the connivance of capitalism and science in an attempt to substitute scientific knowledge for other forms of narrative knowledge raises the question of the legitimation of science, a question that can only be answered through the narrative knowledge scientific practice often seems to replace. Thus, this attempted substitution helped keep narrative knowledge alive in an era dominated by scientific knowledge.

A third reason for this lack of transparency is crucial to the poststructuralist perspective. Actions are inseparable from power; that is, from constraints upon other actions. And power, in its creative as well as its repressive aspects, channels and determines actions in ways often outside the grasp of the actors engaging in them. Thus, new practices with new constraints arise from the power arrangements that infuse social practices. Sometimes those new practices and constraints elude anyone's knowledge. At other times, the manipulation of arrangements of power is more cynical: a practice that intersects with another practice may be appropriated to serve that other practice (or some third practice) without the participants in the serving practice understanding that appropriation. This has been the case until recently with the production of advanced weaponry for defense, which is now more generally understood to serve the practice of profit-gathering for the wealthy as well as—one might say instead of—serving to secure citizens their freedom from attack.

Finally, if one subscribes to the Deleuzian and early Lyotardian concept of forces, the subtending of practices by struggles of forces

5. Steps Toward a Poststructuralist Anarchism

Poststructuralist political theory replaces traditional anarchism's *a priori* with, on the one hand, the positivity or creativity of power and, on the other, the idea that practices or groups of practices (rather than subject or structure) are the proper unit of analysis. We may define a "practice" loosely as a goal-directed social regularity. We must understand, though, that the goals people think they will achieve when engaging in such practices and the consequences they actually do promote are often very different—practices are not necessarily transparent in their effects to the actors who engage in them. This is so for a variety of reasons.

First of all, since practices intersect with other practices, the result of such an intersection (which may itself be a practice) may not be the goal of any of the actors engaged in either practice. The intersection of psychological and legal practices in the formation of the category—and practice—of delinquency, as described by Foucault in his work on prisons is an example of such an intersection. As Deleuze puts it in his foreword to Jacques Donzelot's *The Policing of Families* (a poststructuralist analysis of the intersection of familial and medical practices in nineteenth-century France), "Donzelot's method consists in isolating *pure little lines of mutation* which, acting successively or simultaneously, go to form a contour or surface, a characteristic feature of the new domain. The social is located at the intersection of all these little lines."[1]

---

[1] Gilles Deleuze, "Foreword," in Jacques Donzelot, *The Policing of Families,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1979), p. x.

state, practices that were partially determinative of Greek culture. In contrast, the practice of confession in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, evolving from a confession of deeds to a confession of who one was as a sexual being, became part of the movement toward a knowledge of the interior self that was to dominate the modern understanding of who we are.

Summing up this difference in the relationship of sexual knowledge to conditions of power, Foucault wrote: "The [Greek] relation to truth was a structural, instrumental, and ontological condition for establishing the individual as a moderate subject leading a life of moderation; it was not an epistemological condition enabling the individual to recognize himself in his singularity as a desiring subject and to purify himself of the desire that was thus brought to light."[22] In this description, epistemology is inseparable from politics, displaying Foucault's analysis as properly one of "power/knowledge," a political analysis of knowledge that, while not reducing knowledge to politics, makes clear its fusion with the network of political and social practices. Moreover, this fusion was not one of suppressing sexuality, but of determining and controlling it: "A policing of sex: that is, not the rigor of a taboo, but the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses."[23]

Given, then, the poststructuralist approach to power, its difference from the anarchist *a priori* assumption of the suppressive nature of power, and its view that knowledge and power are often—if not always—intertwined, it is not surprising that it would see a political significance in the assumption that power is suppressive or juridical. That significance has not been given much attention; the focus is more on offering an analytics or a theory of the positivity and local efficacy of power. But Foucault offers a suggestion: "[P]ower is tolerable only on the condition that it mask a substan-

---

[22] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 89.

[23] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:25.

tial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms."[24] Foucault goes on to suggest that the juridical notion of power became encrusted from the Middle Ages on as institutions like the state were able to implant themselves by defining their power in terms of regulation and limitation: that is, in terms of law. Further, as opposition to the policies of the state and its allied institutions arose, the attempt to wrest power from improper regulation continued to define power as proper regulation. Thus power, even when constraining, remains articulated in terms of restraint: "In political thought and analysis, we have not cut off the head of the king."[25] That failure has allowed power to operate in the ways it does without detection.

It would be a mistake here to interpret Foucault as claiming that power intends to mask itself in order to avoid discovery. Such an interpretation ascribes too much intentionality to power (although such an ascription is sometimes Foucault's as well). Rather, it should be taken to mean that had power been thought to operate in the ways in which it does indeed operate (at least in the modern epoch), more fruitful political resistance would have been more likely. The point, if in some sense teleological. is Darwinian rather than Aristotelian. We can explain the success of so many operations of power by the fact that they were not discovered, owing to a misapprehension about power; this does not imply, however, that power "wanted" us to have this misapprehension.

That the anarchist *a priori* regarding power is convergent with the nineteenth century's general conception of the nature of power can be explained, then, as a politically significant failure that bars anarchism from completing the journey down the tactical path along which it traveled. That this failure persists into the twentieth century is also not a cause for surprise, since our political-theoretical landscape is still dominated by the sup-

approach, one that emphasizes the politics of linguistic appropriation rather than the meaning or structure of linguistic units.[45] That politics, however, is one that devolves upon practices, not upon the structures of language or subjective investments, both of which are results as much as causes of that politics. Thus, Lyotard's later work, rather than constituting a rejection of the antihumanism of the libido, is instead an abandonment of the similarities to humanist naturalism that the concept still possesses.

Lyotard, Deleuze, and Foucault share a refusal to view power as solely a negative, repressive force; alongside that refusal—and intertwined with it—they share a rejection of subjectivity as a viable source of political action. What they develop instead of the perspective defined by these concepts, which we have called the *a priori* of traditional anar chism, is a new type of anarchism. This new anarchism retains the ideas of intersecting and irreducible local struggles, of a wariness about representation, of the political as investing the entire field of social relationships, and of the social as a network rather than a closed holism, a concentric field, or a hierarchy. Yet the new anarchism rejects the strategic basis that, for traditional anarchism, had formed the scaffolding of these ideas; it substitutes instead a perspective that is tactical "all the way down." What we must seek to understand next are the general contours of this new anarchism, along with some of the specific theoretical interventions that characterize its project.

---

[24] Ibid, 1:86.
[25] Ibid, (1:90–91.

[45] For Deleuze's treatment of language, see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), esp. the fourth plateau, "November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics": "Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience" (p. 76).

ing and situating *dispositifs,* and that of seeking out the possibility of *singularities* and *events,* is never repudiated by Lyotard, and is in his view fundamental to the task of philosophy."[44] In his later work, however, and especially with its maturation in *The Differend,* his philosophy is transformed from one that is ambivalent between its strategic and tactical commitments into one that is more purely tactical.

Economie libidinale is not unlike traditional anarchism, attempting to locate a single source of positivity from which resistance could be derived. Further, this positivity, though in direct opposition to anarchist humanism, shares with it the role of counterpoint to the prevailing social structure. For the anarchists, that structure is the network of repressions, while for Lyotard it is the representational character of understanding. Nevertheless, for both it is a social structure that blocks the possibility of the full realization of experience; thus, a powerful negativity (or a negative power) looms large in both accounts. Although Lyotard's concept of libido is far more complex and subtle than the anarchlst treatment of humanism, then, the same strategic themes haunt both. For Lyotard, these themes were ultimately unacceptable, and his later philosophy can be seen as a reaction against them.

Although a slightly fuller treatment of Lyotard's view of language in *The Differend* will be offered in the next chapter, it is worth noting here that that view remains an antihumanist one. Language, for Lyotard, is composed of competing "genres," which are bound not to subjective capacities or interests, but to social structures and historical contingencies. In other words, language is a place of struggle between different modes of its use, with different outcomes depending upon which mode prevails. Unlike the semantic or syntactic approach to language that characterizes Anglo-American philosophy, Lyotard (like Deleuze) turns to a pragmatic

pressive assumption about power. Moreover, it is dominated by an assumption that, as has been seen, forms the other (if at times abated) half of anarchism's *a* priori: humanist naturalism, the concept of a benign human essence. If poststructuralist political thought could be summed up in a single prescription, it would be that radical political theory, if it is to achieve anything, must abandon humanism in all its forms.

The poststructuralist reaction against the idea of a benign human essence or, for that matter, any human essence at all—a position that we shall, following the poststructuralists, call "humanism" —is rooted in the history of French thought in the postwar era. Humanism returned to French philosophy in the works of the existentialists, particularly Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. It was combined with the phenomenological thought of Husserl and what there was of phenomenology in Heidegger to give priority of place to the perceiving and acting subject. The driving thought behind the appropriation ot phenomenalogy by the existentialists is the Kantian one that the world cannot be apprehended except through the facilities of the perceiving subject, whether that subject be empirical or transcendental. Such a subject possesses three key characteristics that mutually imply one another: a consciousness transparent to itself; voluntary self-determination; and (to a greater or lesser degree) the constitution of its own experience. In Sartre's early works, especially *Being and* Nothingness, the idea of the primacy of the subject issues in a philosophy of radical freedom, wherein the subject's essence is to be a nothingness, the pure appropriation of a world that, in order to hide its own nothingness from itself, it tries to model itself after. This nothingness, then, is a freedom from all determination by the world; what Sartre calls "bad faith" *(mauvaise fois)* is precisely the attempt to escape the burden of freedom

---

[44] Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 46.

by taking on the concrete determinations of being that characterize the world.[26]

Merleau-Ponty's existentialism is more measured than Sartre's, admitting the possibility of the subject being determined both by the unconscious structure of bodily behavior and by the social institutions in which it is encrusted. (The latter type of determination is conceded by Sartre after his turn toward Marxism.) Nevertheless, until his last writings (most notably *The Visible and the Invisible),* Merleau-Ponty's philosophical approach continues to be through subjective experience in its interaction with the world. The humanism of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is an important factor in his break with Sartre; what offends him in Sartre's defense of communism, and in particular his valorization of the Party, is its denial of the role of subjectivity as a necessary constituent in the Marxist dialectic.[27]

As the atrocities of World War II and its aftermath, some committed with great enthusiasm, became increasingly evident, doubt was cast upon the faith that both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty placed in the subject (a doubt shared not least of all by themselves). The rise of structuralism can be read in part as a reaction to the primacy existentialism places upon the subject. The anthropological works of Claude LeviStrauss, the psychoanalytical texts of Jacques Lacan, the structural psychology of Jean Piaget, and the Marxism of Louis Althusser with its rejection of Marx's early humanism, share a common conception of the subject as produced rather than producing, as an effect rather than a cause. Whether the determination of the subject is through structures of myth and kinship, the unconscious, the cognitive structures of the mind, or the political (and especially economic) structure of society, the theme is

representational realizations of the libidinous. Since all political action involves representation, this will necessarily be a paradoxical project. For Lyotard the goal is to subvert representation by exhausting its resources, by bringing it to the limit. As an example, Lyotard cites Klossowskf s discussion of the multiplication of gods in pagan religion that so offended Augustine: "[F]or each connection, a divine name, for each cry, intensity and connection that brings encounters both expected and unexpected, a small god, a small goddess … which is a name for the passage of emotions. Thus every encounter gives rise to a divinity, all connections to an inundation of affects."[43] The subversion of representation is by means of a multiplication rather than a diminution of representing entities, a multiplication that drives the representational system to its own point of explosion. (For Lyotard, it is the same with capitalism: the "anarchy" of the system should be pushed to, and ultimately beyond, its limits. One does not destroy capitalism by criticism but by bringing its own principle to the limit, where it bursts.)

In the later 1970s Lyotard moves away from the libidinal model, calling it too "metaphysical.'" The problem with positing a libido at the base of all experience is that it repeats the same problem for which he had criticized representation: since the libido is outside all representation, all discussion of it involves reference to an absence that dominates the discourse. Libidinal economy does not resolve the problem of negativity, it only reawakens it in a new form. Instead of the libido, Lyotard directs his concern primarily to language, which had been a more implicit preoccupation during the critique-of-representation phase. However, although Lyotard's philosophical framework changes, his dual project of describing the apparatuses of oppression and repression and returning to the singular and irreducible—as opposed to the unifying and representational—remains. As Geoffrey Bennington has put it, "The bare project of the book [*Economie iibidinate*], that of describ-

---

[26] For Sartre's celebrated discussion of bad faith, see J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), pp. 86–116.

[27] For a critique of Sartre, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Sartre and Ultrabolshevism," in *Adventures of the Dialectic,* trans. Joseph Bein (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 95–201.

---

[43] Lyotard, *Economie libidinale*, p. 17 (my translation).

The problem with representation is that it freezes the libido into a structure that is dominated not by the libido's positivity but by the negativity of an absent object. A representation is always a stand-in for something else that is not there, and it is the absent object that dominates the discourse of representation. Representation, in attempting to capture the libido conceptually, instead betrays it, and in two ways: first, by pretending to be capable of accounting for it, although representation is only one of its effects; second, by introducing negativity or absence into that account, which is not of the essence of libido, but only of libido in its representational form.

Lyotard's critique of representation, as well as his account of the libidinal economy, is profoundly antihumanist. It is precisely by a gesture of self-representation that the subject is able to understand himself or herself; and although that self-representation is, by its transparency, supposed to offer an immediate access by the self to its own consciousness, the very act of representation presupposes a difference between representer and represented that introduces absence into the representation.[42] (Here one can sense the Derridean influence on Lyotard's thought.) Thus, the project of a subject's grasping its own essence is necessarily a distorting one: the libidinous essence of the subject cannot be grasped by it, and is "misrepresented" in the subjective attempt to grasp it.

Any political intervention, if it is to be successful, must discard all projects—including the subjectivist one of comprehending and realizing one's essence—that work through representation; instead, such intervention must embark upon a program of subverting the pretensions to completeness of the representational structure. It must open up other possibilities for action that cannot be reduced to representation and its negativity, but that instead allow for non-

the same: humanism as a philosophical project is fundamentally misplaced in seeking the constitution of the subject in a subjective essence. The constitution of the subject comes from outside its own realm of reflection and decision, thus undermining at a stroke the subject's transparency, voluntarism, and self-constitution.

Poststructural ism retained the structuralist dismissal of the subject in its philosophy. In the foreword to the English-language edition of *The Order of Things,* Foucault writes: "If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomeno logical approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness."[28] Deleuze calls the philosophical tradition that leads from Hegel through Husserl to Heidegger "a scholasticism worse than that of the Middle Ages."[29] Lyotard's first published study, Phenomenology, shows how phenomenology's attempt to articulate a pre-predicative subjective experience, an experience not encrusted in material reality, particularly the materiality of history, is self-defeating: "In locating the source of meaning in the interstices between the objective and the subjective, [phenomenology] has not realized that the objective (and not the existential) already contains the subjective as negation and as overcoming, and that matter itself is meaning."[30] However, while continuing to jettison the subject as a relevant source of its own constitution or action, poststructuralism also casts doubt upon the structuralists' resort to unitary structures outside the subject as an account of its determination. As has been seen, rather than subsuming the subject under the structure as structuralism does (inverting the existential-phenomenological subsumption of structure under subject), post-

---

[42] For a fuller account of this introduction of difference into representation, see Jacques Derrida's critique of Husserlian linguistics. *Speech and Phenomena,* trans. David Allison (Ev anston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

[28] Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. xiv.
[29] Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogue,* p. 12.
[30] J.-F. Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, trans. Gayle Ormiston (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), p. 135.

structuralism dissolves the subject/structure dichotomy altogether by substituting for both a concept that might be called "practices." What is of interest to the poststructuralists is neither the constituting interiority of the subject nor the constituting exteriority of structures, but instead the interlocking network of contingent practices that produces both "subjects" and "structures." Whether these practices are founded upon a metaphysics of forces, as is the case with Deleuze and the Lyotard of the 1970s, or rejects metaphysical grounding, as do Foucault and more recent Lyotardian writings, they remain a multiple, diverse, and contingent network of events, effects, and influences that defies such dichotomies as above/below and inside/outside. Subjects and structures are sedimentations of practices whose source cannot be discovered in a privileged ontological domain but that must be sought, rather, among the specific practices in which they arise.

Foucault's rejection of humanism is explicit in his remarks about his work: "My objective ... has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."[31] Although his early works have more in common with structuralism than he was wont to admit, by the time of Discipline and *Punish* he abandons the idea of grand strategic social formations (archaeology) for the study of small practices that give rise to the taken-for-granted "realities" of our culture (genealogy). In both periods, though, Foucault is concerned to show that the subject is not a source of its own essence, which implies that the subject *has* no essence (as that concept is traditionally conceived). This is the idea behind his remark at the end of *The Order of Things* that as epistemic structures shift, "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."[32] It is even more evident in his works on the prison and sexuality, which show how some of the

and a not-this), it ceaselessly escapes the grasp of the subject it determines. It is thus always beyond representation, although it is at the same time the source of all representation; it cannot be represented by the subject in an act of transparent self-consciousness, even though the subject is a libidinous effect. Second, for Lyotard the very idea of representation is problematic; the attempt to reduce experience to representation is a project to be overcome, not completed. Representation is a species of the more general practice of "theatrics," which Lyotard much criticized during the time of *Economie libidinale* for its stultifying effect upon the libido through its introduction of the negativity of absence (distinguishable from death, which can be a positive destruction or autodestruction). Lyotard's critique of Freud's attempt to adapt the libido to a representational schema is exemplary of his view:

> It is clear that for Freud the roll of film is something like a work of art because it is a sign, because it replaces something (the mother) for someone (the child). But for the student of libidinal economy this function of image or sign is not pertinent because it presupposes what one must try to produce by theoretical argument: negativity. To say that the child acts out in his suffering the pain caused by his mother's absence is to take suddenly as given all the components of the theatrical space... In short one gives in to the demands of the order of representation (which is secondary), without allowing oneself to be concerned at all with the principle that one had oneself so cleverly established: if it is indeed true that the primary processes know no negation, then in the economy of drives there is not, nor can there ever be, an absence of the mother [41] ...

---

[31] Foucault, "Afterword," in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 208.

[32] Foucault, *The Order of Things,* p. 387.

---

[41] Lyotard, "Beyond Representation," *Human Context* 7 (1975): 497.

to invoke Oedipus as an account of the formation of the modern subject: "Deleuze and Guattari must be supported against themselves: capitalism is indeed an orphanage, a celibacy, submitted to the rule of equivalence. What supports it is not the configuration of the great castrator, but that of equality: equality in the sense of commutability of men in one place and of places for one man, of men and women, objects, spaces, organs... [Repression never stops becoming more *exteriorized*."[38]

This criticism does not mean that Lyotard, in his works of the early and mid-1970s, abandons the Deleuzian/Nietzschean framework altogether. His major work of that time, *Economie libidinale*[39] borrows the theme or idea of constitution by forces and, recasting desire as libido, tries to offer an account of the workings of capitalism and of representation without recourse either to the subjective or the structural. For Lyotard, libido is an anonymous energy that both constitutes that which is oppressive and offers an alternative to it. Libido differs from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desire, though, in being not only productive but destructive as well, and in the same gesture that it is productive: "[E]very intensity, brilliant or distant, is always *this and not-this,* and not at all by the effect of castration, repression, ambivalence, or the tragedy of the great Zero, but by that which the intensity is the asynthetic movement."[40] Lyotard's concept of libido is modeled on Freud's notion of life and death instincts, except that for Lyotard the two are not separate instincts but part of the same anonymous force.

Two aspects of this concept of libido are crucial for understanding Lyotard's rejection of humanism. First, as in Freud, the libido is a constitutive rather than a constituted force. Moreover, in its anonymity and its irreducibility to its own constructs (the constructs of the libido are always a this or a not-this, never a this

[38] J.-F. Lyotard, "Energumen Capitalism," *Semiotext(e) 2,* no. 3 (1977): 22.
[39] Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974.
[40] Lyotard, *Economic libidinale, p.* 25 (my translation).

central themes through which we understand our subjectivity are products of practices that have as much to do with politics as with knowledge:

> It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished—and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those that are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. This is the historical reality of the soul ...[33]

For Foucault, the subject is constituted rather than constituting. This does not, however, mean that people are determined. The subject, as such, is a historical construction that emerged from practices that were both political and epistemological. We think of ourselves as subjects, we act as subjects, and in that sense we are subjects: "[I]t exists, it has a reality." But subjectivity ("There are *two* meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge"),[34] since it is a historical phenomenon dependent upon the practices from which it emerged and which sustain it, can be altered or abolished by new practices. These practices cannot emanate from a subject—as an act of subjective will— but they can come from people inserting their actions into the contingent web of historical events and institutions. The constitution of the subject is not the exhaustive determination of behavior, although inasmuch as it is appropriated as a mode of self-knowledge, and

[33] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 29.
[34] Foucault, "Afterword," p. 212. See also his *History of Sexuality,* 1:60.

thus as a mode of living, subjectivity will define the parameters of our options, our powers, and the normal and acceptable range of our behavior.

Deleuze's positing of forces subtending the objects of experience already subverts any commitment to the idea of a self-determining subject. What Deleuze rejects is both the self-mastery and the unity that the idea of subjectivity implies. Regarding self-mastery. Deleuze emphasizes throughout his writings the role of one sort of unconscious or another in determining both action and self-consciousness. Thus, "To remind consciousness of its necessary modesty is to take it for what it is: a symptom; nothing but the symptom of a deeper transformation of the activities of entirely non-spiritual forces."[35] These unconscious forces, moreover, form a diversity rather than a unity. In Dialogues, Deleuze claims that individuals and groups are the intersection and development of three different kinds of "lines": 1) segmentary lines, like those of a person's life cycle (e.g., family-school-army-job-retirement); 2) molecular lines, which are the invisible forces, coming from disparate directions in the social field and acting more subtly than the "molar" segmentary lines; and 3) lines of flight, which are other molecular lines we draw to escape our determination by the specific molar and molecular lines that constitute us.[36]

All of these lines, including the last, act upon us without our conscious consent (most of the time). Moreover, they determine what will count as consciousness at all; they are the forces of which consciousness is the symptom. They are the parts that determine the whole, which is not a unity but merely a part alongside the others: "We no longer believe in the myth of existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity...

___

35 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 39.
36 See Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues,* pp. 124–34.

100

We believe only in totalities that are peripheral."[37] Furthermore, at least one of the wholes that we have been told we are, "the Oedipal subject," is not the basis for a project of political freedom, but, as Anti-Oedipus tries to show, a continuation of oppression.

This subversion of the primacy of consciousness is also a subversion of the notion of subjectivity, since subjectivity is a concept that implies the ability of a person consciously to recognize and control the forces "within" him or her. Deleuze's subversion, though different from Foucault's in being metaphysical as well as historical, nevertheless strikes at the heart of any humanist project as the articulation of a subjectivity with an essence that can be both consciously grasped and voluntarily expressed or fulfilled. For Foucault, what has been called our "essence" is a political project that is oppressive rather than liberating (and, even here, we must not understand the notion of liberation as the freeing of an essential nature that has been socially bound). For Deleuze, the "essence" of subjectivity does not belong to it; rather, it comes from multiple and various sites, it cannot be lived out or fulfilled and, in the form of the Oedipal subject, it is harmful rather than helpful to political transformation.

Jean-François Lyotard, whose philosophy has undergone a transformation from sharing with Deleuze a metaphysical orientation to a concern with language that is more Foucauldian in its empirical approach, outstrips both of his colleagues on the issue of humanism by constructing philosophies that leave the subject out of account altogether. Lyotard has never shown a preoccupation with humanism, even to subvert it. He has sought consistently for an approach to political philosophy that articulates relationships of power as well as modes of resistance as anonymous and impersonal, inhering in practices that cannot be reduced to, nor need address deeply, the subjective or the structural. Lyotard criticizes Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* precisely for feeling the need

___

37 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Odipus*, p. 42.

101

themselves; the "ought" here is a prescriptive for action, not a recommendation for sanctions.

What does it mean, then, to say that people ought not to engage in practices of representing others to themselves, and why the caveat "as much as possible"? The answer to the latter query will become clear below in our discussion of the nature of an ethical claim; there I make the case that almost all ethical principles involve caveats. As for the former question, the principle is a response to the essentialism about human beings posited by the humanist tradition. If there is a natural human essence, it is not unreasonable to try to discover and perhaps cultivate it. If not, then there is no bar to creating oneself. We have seen that, for the poststructuralists, talk of a natural human essence was a political project as much as (or even more than) an epistemic one; moreover, the politics to which it gave rise had, among other effects, the result of dampening resistance to oppressive social relationships.

Therefore, the antirepresentationalist principle subscribed to by Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze (despite themselves) has two faces. First, the power to represent people to themselves is oppressive in itself. practices of telling people who they are and what they want erect a barrier between them and who (or what) they can create themselves to be. Ami-Oedipus can be read in this light as a work whose project is to demolish current representational barriers between people and who they can become, and in that sense Foucault states its point exactly when he calls it "a book of ethics." Second, representing people to themselves helps to reinforce other oppressive social relationships. As Lyotard points out in *The Postmodern Condition,* for instance, there is a connivance between science as a practice-of-efficiency and the Enlightenment narrative of human history as a progressive freeing of itself from the bondage of superstition. And for Foucault, the disciplinary project reinforces capitalist social relationships: "If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion

which escape is sought. "My point," Foucault once said, "is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism."[25]

Micropolitical theory, then, must be seen as carrying through the anarchist critique of representation. By articulating the epistemic problem of representation in its entwinement with the political one, poststructuralism has completed that critique by showing where political representation fails. This completion was unavailable to traditional anarchism because of its commitment to a humanism whose foundations are not the alternative to representation, but the very core of the problem itself. Once this is recognized, not only does the problem of representation become clear, so does the place of theory in political struggle. "Who speaks and acts?" Deleuze asks, answering: "It is always a multiplicity even within the person who speaks and acts. All of us are 'groupuscules.' Representation no longer exists; there's only action— theoretical action and practical action which serve as relays and form networks."[26]

The engagement in micropolitics, however, leaves open an important question, one that has often been raised to proponents of micropolitical intervention: What is the relationship of micropolitical practice to macropolitical structures? Surely the poststructuralists do not deny the efficacy of the state or the capitalist economic system. But if so, then what position do those institutions occupy in poststructuralist political discourse?

The poststructuralist perspective on macropolitics involves two interrelated claims: that the practices of macropolitical institutions (and noninstitutional macropolitical practices like capitalism) often emerge from local practices; and that when macropolitical entities

---

[25] Deleuze in Foucault "Politics and Ethics: An Interview," in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow; trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 343.

[26] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," pp. 206–7.

arise, the local practices that generated them do not become a mere corollary or auxiliary aspect of them. The first claim is not only a historical one, but it is that as well. Foucault writes that the local tactics that formed our current arrangements of power "were invented and organized from the starting points of local conditions and particular needs. They took shape in piecemeal fashion, prior to any class strategy designed to wield them into vast, coherent ensembles. It should also be noted that these ensembles don't consist in a homogenisation, but rather of a complex play of supports in mutual engagement, different mechanisms of power which retain all their specific character."[27]

For Foucault, the rise of current power relationships is traceable to specific local practices and must be understood on the basis of them. Failure to do so would lead—and has led—to the assumption that by destroying oppressive macropolitical entities and practices, the power arrangments reflected in those entities and practices will themselves disappear. Deleuze differs from Foucault in arguing that it is not only current but *all* macropolitical power relationships that must be understood on the basis of micropolitical practices; he understands the local generation of power metaphysically, not just historically. However, the two agree on the political point that macropolitics is founded on micropolitical practice, and that an understanding of macropolitical practice requires an understanding of micropolitical practice: "All molar functionalism is false, since the organic or social machines are not formed in the same way they function, and the technical machines are not assembled in the same way they are used, but imply precisely specific conditions that separate their own production from their distinct product."[28]

If macropolitical institutions and practices are founded on micropolitical practices, this does not mean that the goals of macropo-

_____

[27] Foucault, "The Eye of Power," in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 159.

[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 288.

It seems, then, that poststructuralist anarchism wants to take back with one hand the ethical principles it goes to great lengths to cast aside with the other. What I would like to argue here is that despite themselves, Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard predicate much of their political work on several intertwined and not very controversial ethical principles. Moreover, it is their commitment to these principles that led them astray in their specific treatments of ethics.

The first ethical principle to which poststructuralism is committed is that practices of representing others to themselves—either in who they are or in what they want—ought, as much as possible, to be avoided. (We can distinguish between a practice of representing someone to himor herself and an isolated act of doing so as roughly analogous to the difference between a friend telling another friend that he or she seems angry and a psychologist telling him or her that in a therapy session.) It is precisely the commitment to this principle that is at play in the reticence the poststructuralists have shown toward promoting general ethical principles. The mistake, made by Deleuze and Foucault in avoiding ethical principles altogether and by Lyotard in trying to avoid universalizing them, is that their avoidance is itself an ethically motivated one. In the conversation cited above, where Deleuze praises Foucault for being the one "to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others," he is laying out a principle of behavior that it would be unimaginable to assume he does not think ought to bind the behavior of others. This does not, of course, mean that there need to be laws against practices of representing people to

_____

29, no. 2 (1991): 227–44. He notes the necessity for a principle, which he calls "a rationality of multiplicity" (p. 239), which is a picture of how reason appears only in specific linguistic practices—what Foucault would call specific "rationalities"— and yet these rationalities can be held to the demand that they answer to. or at least respect and interact with, practices other than their own. The argument here is that such a demand is an ethical one, and in that sense ethical discourse creates principles to which other discourses are held.

The position here is of a piece with that developed in *The Differend.* The political project regarding language is that of respecting genres and avoiding the domination of some genres by others. The problem here, as Sam Weber points out in the afterword to *Just Gaming*, is that such a project is internally incoherent: "[T]he concern with 'preserving the purity' and singularity 'of each game' by reinforcing its isolation from the others gives rise to exactly what was intended to be avoided: 'the domination of one game by another', namely, the domination of the prescriptive."[24] The command to respect the diversity of language games is precisely an ethical one; moreover, it is a universally binding one. "Everyone ought to respect the diversity of language games" is a prescriptive that is not confined to prescriptive discourse but is meant to be followed regardless of what genre of language one is engaged in.

There is another problem. It cannot be the case that *all* genres ought equally to be respected. If it were, then genres whose project is to dominate other genres would have to be equally respected—which, while not theoretically incoherent, is certainly politically incoherent. This is precisely Peter Dews's point. Thus, not only must the command to respect language games be universal, it must be nuanced in order to pro mote what it wants to promote: the flourishing of different genres of discursive practice. Lyotard would like to press the idea that it is judgment, in the Kantian sense of deciding cases without appeal to overarching rules, that must determine our assessment in particular cases of conflict between genres. This, however, cannot be true: for judgment to get off the ground at all, there must be a principle to which appeal is made. A more accurate picture of judgment, a picture that will be drawn below, is to see it as a matter of often competing principles that must be honed more finely in particular cases than to see it as lacking principles altogether.[25]

---

[24] Ibid., p. 104.

[25] Steven Hendley provides a discussion of this issue in "Judgment and Rationality in Lyotard's Discursive Archipelago," *The Southern* Journal *of Philosophy*

litical practices are simply those of their micropolitical constituents writ large. As noted above, the intersection of various practices creates other practices whose consequences could not have been foreseen by the practitioners of the initial practices. Thus, although micropolitical power arrangements often reinforce (and are reinforced by) macropolitical ones, it would be mistaken to view them as sharing an identical structure. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard argues that the view of knowledge propounded by modern (as opposed to postmodern) science converged with practices of capitalism in reinforcing the values of efficiency and productivity. He does not, however, make the implausible inference to the idea that modern science and capitalism share similar power relationships. In fact, it is precisely because they are not the same that they can be thought of as reinforcing; otherwise, they would have to be considered, politically at least, identical.

The heterogeneity of micropolitical and macropolitical practices ensures that the former will not be reduced to or absorbed into the latter. This heterogeneity has several consequences. First, the attempt to reduce the former to the latter—in other words, the project of strategic political philosophy and practice—is bound to fail, because it misses all the micropolitical relationships woven into the macropolitical one. The twentieth-century philosophical failure of that project was detailed in Chapter 2, above; its practical failure is detailed, for instance, in the history of the Soviet Union.[29] Second, the understanding of relationships of power, both macro- and micropolitical, must be gleaned through local studies that are

---

[29] Foucault puts the practical point this way: "I do not mean to minimize the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness. In Soviet society one has the example of a State apparatus which has changed hands, yet leaves social hierarchies, family life, sexuality, and the body more or less they were in capitalist society" ("Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge,* pp. 72–73).

"gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary": in other words, by genealogies. Third, however, macropolitical relationships cannot be reduced to micropolitical ones. There is no more a downward reducibility than an upward one. Precisely because macropolitical practices are products of the intersections and convergences of multifarious local practices, the nature of a macropolitical practice cannot be read off the constituting micropolitical ones. Thus, Deleuze writes, "[E]verything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*."[30] And Foucault: "[T]here is a certain correlation between the two processes, global and local, but not an absolute one."[31] Micropolitical genealogies, then, are not substitutes for macropolitical studies; rather, they must stand alongside such studies, not merely as additions but as integrally interwoven into them. Seen this way, micropolitics does not leave macropolitical understanding broadened but untouched in its essence. Instead, micropolitical theory—and practice—reforms traditional understandings of, and interventions into, macropolitical institutions and practices.

We cannot here treat the specific genealogies and other micropolitical studies of Foucault, Lyotard, and Deleuze. They occupy the major part of the corpus of these writers. However, a brief sketch of several studies provides an opportunity to see how poststructuralist anarchism articulates the political significance of practices that are local, generative of macropolitical practices, and nonreducible. For that purpose, we will follow Foucault's genealogy of the modern soul in *Discipline and Punish*, Lyotard's view of the political nature of language in *The Differend,* and Deleuze's view of the state, given at scattered points in *Anti-Oedipus*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, and *Dialogues.*

the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all', but within specific sectors, where their own conditions of life or work situate them."[21]

This studied reticence constrasts sharply, however, with the tone of Foucault's histories, in which the practices of psychoanalysis, prison rehabilitation, population control, and so on are discussed in a way that is designed to raise doubts about their ethical acceptability. In those works, while confining the scope of his political analysis, he seems to offer reasons—ethical reasons—to abandon practices that have presented themselves to us as natural and unavoidable.

Lyotard has been more attuned to the ethical dimension of political theory than either Deleuze or Foucault; but in trying to engage in ethical recommendations, he has avoided the universal bindingness of norms traditionally associated with ethical principles. His extended conversation with Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Au juste* (entitled in English Just *Gam*ing), tries to come to terms with this problem regarding the issue of justice. The threat posed to practice in articulating a universal conception of justice is that of allowing one linguistic genre (namely, the cognitive) to dominate others. In answer to Thebaud's question "Why be just?" Lyotard replies that "any discourse meant to account for prescriptions, transforms them into conclusions of reasonings, into propositions derived from other propositions, in which the latter are metaphysical propositions on being and history, or on the soul, or on society... What seems to me so strong in Kant's position, of course, as well as in Levinas's, is that they reject in principle such a derivation or such a deduction."[22] Lyotard concludes that the "language game" of ethics "has no origin; it is not derivable. There you are. This implies that the task is one of multiplying and refining language games."[23]

[30] Deleuze and Guattari, A *Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 213.

[31] Foucault, "Prison Talk," in *Power/Knowledge,* p. 39.

[21] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 126.

[22] Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, trans Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 45.

[23] Ibid, p. 49.

as that (I have argued elsewhere that, for Deleuze, life-affirming forces as well as life-denying forces are within rather than exterior to life),[18] the question remains as to which forces are to be determined as life-affirming and which as lifedenying. How are we to recognize and distinguish the practices that are active from those which are reactive? Deleuze's answer to this question—that we must experiment—is not enough, because what is at issue here is not how to promote active forces but how to assess whether an arrangement offorces, or a practice, once promoted, is indeed active or reactive. In other words, the question is not one of how to achieve a goal, but one of deciding which goals are to be achieved.

Foucault's reticence in regard to propounding principles of action is legendary. His oft-quoted remark in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality,* "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire [the psychoanalytic model], but bodies and pleasures,"[19] is more generally cited for its crypticism and inadequate development than for its development of an alternative view of sexual practice.[20] Throughout his life, Foucault avoided either making recommendations for action or suggesting principles for deciding which actions or practices should be promoted and which avoided. Indeed, his proposals regarding the "specific intellectual," discussed in Chapter 5, above, seem at first glance (and may have seemed to Foucault) to imply a limitation on the scope of intellectual ethical discourse: "Intellectuals have got used to working, not in the modality of the 'universal',

[18] Todd May, "The Politics of Life in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze," *SubStance* 20, no. 3 (1991): 24–35.

[19] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 1: *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 157.

[20] E.g.: Mark Cousins and Athar Hussain, Michel *Foucault* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 223.

Foucault's discussion of the rise of the modern soul—what contemporary psychologists would call the "personality"—illustrates two aspects of genealogical thought that are central to poststructuralist anarchism. First, it shows how small, dispersed, and local practices give rise to effects that are at once generally disseminated throughout society and unpredictable on the basis of any strategic principle of historical causality. Second, since the modern soul is both an object and a subject of knowledge, its production as a theoretical object shows the intertwining of practices of knowledge and practices of power.

Discipline and Punish offers a history of the modern soul that sees it to be inextricably linked to the rise and general currency of disciplinary practices. Before the nineteenth century, the preferred method of punishment was torture (*supplice* is the French term, of which "torture" is a loose translation that may miss some of the ritual characteristics implied by original term). Torture as a punitive practice was in keeping with the sovereignty of power associated with a king or prince. A crime, since it was an offense against the sovereign, was at the same time an offense against the ruler himself. Criminality, because it attacked the public order, constituted a personal attack against the sovereign who was identified with that order. To restore order, then, the sovereign had to be avenged. The power of the body of the sovereign had to be displayed against the offender in order to reestablish the sovereign's body as indeed sovereign. Thus, the spectacularly gruesome ritual described in the opening pages of Foucault's text.

There were two problems with the practice of torture, however, that led to its demise. First, the fear that was supposed to be instilled in observers of the torture—a fear of the power of the body of the sovereign—often turned into sympathy for the tortured and consequently resentment toward the sovereign. Second, there emerged a group of reformers who were horrified at the spectacle of public torture and at the degradation it involved. Pressure thus arose for a change in the method of punishment. It must be kinder,

but also, since the rise of capitalism at this time required a respect for property, it must be more efficient. Rather than exercising authority brutally and arbitrarily, punishment must, argued the reformers, be performed both humanely and universally.

One of the techniques that had been used in dispersed areas caught the eye of judicial reformers. Discipline (the French term, *surveiller,* implies both a disciplinary conformity and the idea of surveillance) had long been practiced in monasteries but was now being applied, in very different ways, to schools, factories, and the military. In discipline, bodies are made to conform through the regular surveillance and regulation of corporeal movements; in this way, power is exercised not massively but minutely, and more effectively. By training the body, by breaking its movements down analytically and then subjecting those movements to disciplinary processes, a docile body—a body of regularly instilled habits—is created: "[W]hat one is trying to restore in this technique of correction is not so much the juridical subject... but the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him."[32]

The emergence of the docile body brought in its wake a series of changes that were to form the basis for both rehabilitative (as opposed to punitive) disciplinary practice and psychological theory and practice. First, criminality was seen now to be an offense not against the sovereign, or even against society as the reformers thought, but against normality—the normally efficient and productive use of the body. Criminals were no longer outlaws, they were unproductive members of society. Second, the binary opposition of the legal and the illegal, or the permitted and the forbidden, gave way to a new opposition, one that was no longer binary but, as it were, concentric: the normal and the abnormal. The completely docile body was normal, and abnormality was measured in terms

---

[32] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 128–29

be constructed—a space, they argue, that is precluded by poststructuralist political theory.

Before trying to articulate a view of ethics that is in conformity with poststructuralist anarchism, it is worth pausing a moment to show how much poststructuralists have left themselves open to the Critical Theoretical critique. Although I will argue that such a critique is misplaced, the thinkers we are considering have surely given reason to believe it isn't. Perhaps Deleuze is the most vehement in his rejection of traditional ethics. He praises Spinoza's Ethics, for instance, because it "replaces Morality, which always refers existence to transcendent values."[15] For Deleuze, as for Nietzsche, the project of measuring life against external standards constitutes a betrayal rather than an affirmation of life. Alternatively, an ethics of the kind Spinoza has offered (as opposed to what Deleuze calls "morality," which *we* have here called "ethics") seeks out the possibilities life offers rather than denigrating life by appeal to "transcendent values." Casting the matter in more purely Nietzschean terms, the project of evaluating a life by reference to external standards is one of allowing reactive forces to dominate active ones, where reactive forces are those which "separate *active force from what it can do.*"[16]

More than one commentator has pointed to the irony of an ethical approach that, while condemning traditional ethical evaluation by reference to standards that are not instantiated in life, promotes instead an approach to evaluation that itself banks on what could be but is not yet.[17] Although the matter is not quite as simple

---

[15] Gilles Deleuze, Spinoza: *Practical Philosophy,* trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), p. 23.

[16] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 57.

[17] See, for example, Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 180; and Vincent Pecora, "Deleuze's Nietzsche and Post-Structuralist Thought," *Substance,* vol. 14, no. 3 (1986):esp. 48.

presumed conditions necessary to achieve the goals of one's performance. Moreover, the ethical principles that would arise from a moral discussion that occurs under the conditions of the ideal speech situation—and only those principles—would be binding upon all participants in its formulation, since it would be the goal the participants sought by communicative engagement. Habermas called the bindingness of such principles "principle D": "that only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all concerned in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse."[13]

Although we will assess the viability of discourse ethics below, what is important to note here is that its project is to provide universally binding ethical principles for all communicative activity. Moreover, insofar as almost every practice involves to some degree what Habermas and Apel call "communicative activity," and since in addition communicative activity crosses the borders of specific practices, the principles of discourse ethics are generally binding on social activity: "Discourse generalizes, abstracts, and stretches the presuppositions of contextbound communicative actions by extending their range to include competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life."[14] Finally, since these principles are not given in and through a practice of ethical discussion, but instead lie *beneath* all discussion, they provide a foundation for practice that cannot justifiably be co-opted by any oppressive or distorting political intervention. In short, they constitute the parameters within which a critical space can

in *The* Communicative Ethics *Controversy,* ed. Seyla Benhabib and Fred Dallmyer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 43.

[13] Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in *The* Communicative Ethics Controversy, ed. Benhabib and Dallmyer, p. 90.

[14] Jürgen Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel's Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?" in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action,* trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), p. 202.

of its deviance from the optimum normal state. As a result, discipline could now be applied not only to those who had broken the law, but to anyone who was not optimally normal—in other words, to everyone. Third, the focus of judicial intervention was no longer to be the act of criminality, but the criminal him- or herself. In a reversal of medieval and Renaissance tradition, wherein it was the nobility who emitted signs of their individual distinction, now it was deviancy that was individualized, in order to be scrutinized, evaluated, and cured: "All the sciences, analyses or practices employing the root 'psycho-' have their origin in this historical reversal of the procedures of individualization."[33]

The rise of psychology, then, is entwined with a series of power relationships that not only are associated with psychological intervention but also create psychology's object: the modern soul. Knowledge here is inseparable from power relationships; to engage in an epistemic project of psychological knowledge is to enter into a historically constituted political practice whose effects include the individualizing of deviancy, the muddying of the distinction between the permitted and the forbidden, the emphasis in self-knowledge on "internal" as opposed to social determinants, and the justification of surveillance and discipline of one's entire society. It must be understood that this situation was the result neither of a conspiracy nor a transcendental principle guiding history. There was no intent to create the effects of psychological practice as it is currently performed, nor was there any ineluctability about its emergence: "It [Foucault is referring directly to discipline, but indirectly to psychology] is rather a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another according to their domain of application, converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general

[33] Ibid, p. 193.

method."[34] It is the purpose of genealogies precisely to study those processes and their effects.

One might object that it is possible to conceive of a practice that we might want to call "psychological" that would not have such effects, even in our society. Foucault's genealogy of the modern soul provides no proof against this possibility, nor is it designed to. What *Discipline and Punish* traces are not possible psychological practices, but actual ones. Foucault seeks to show the relationships of power within which our current practices are immersed. As such, he offers some reason to abandon psychological practice as we know it, but no reason in principle to reject the possibility of a nonoppressive psychological practice. This is in keeping with the poststructuralist conception of social relationships. If society is a network of contingently related practices, then judging the value of a certain practice or type of practice is related to judging its likely effects upon the network it inhabits. Such a judgment cannot be made in principle but only probabilistically, given the complexity of social networks. Thus it can be said that another psychological practice would, by virtue of being called "psychological," likely be appropriated as part of the more general psychological field and produce in its own way many of the same effects. It has been argued that this is exactly what happened in the United States with feminist and gay psychotherapeutic practice.[35]

It is tempting, but mistaken, to view the modern soul as the linchpin of contemporary relationships of power. Although psychology is a uniquely modern political practice, it is not the only significant modern practice of power. As Foucault puts it: "The power of the Norm appears through the disciplines. Is this the new law of modern society? Let us say rather that, since the eighteenth century, it has joined other powers—the Law, the Word, and the

---

[34] Ibid., p. 138.

[35] See here Robert Castel, Franchise Castel, and Anne Lovell, *The Psychiatric Society,* trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp, 231–47.

What the ideal speech situation provides for Apel and Habermas is the presupposition for all communication aimed toward truth, one that must infuse all communicative activity. Otherwise put, any communicative activity that aims toward truth (Habermas's more recent writings have broadened out communicative activity to include expressive, regulative, and imperative types of communication as well as truth-oriented ones)[10] must presume that its participants will try to eliminate, insofar as possible, any obstacles that might preclude achieving truth. Thus, among the presumptions operative in communicative activity are that all participants will speak sincerely, that each will allow other participants a full hearing, and that they will endeavor to be convinced by the best reasons rather than by trick, rhetoric, or any other form of distortion. A communicative practice that would in fact realize those presumptions would constitute the ideal speech situation; the obligation to fulfill them constitutes the ethical underpinning of any communicative activity.

There are, then, ethical underpinnings for all communicative activity, binding upon those who engage in it. For Apel, "the *rational argumentation* that is presupposed in every discussion of a problem, in itself presupposes the validity of universal, ethical norms."[11] To violate those underpinnings is to contradict oneself in the sense that one is frustrating oneself from achieving the ends one seeks to achieve by engaging in communicative activity. The contradiction involved is not a logical one but instead a *"pragmatic self-contradiction"*:[12] one's actual performance contradicts the

---

[10] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative* Action, Vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), esp. p. 329.

[11] Karl-Otto Apel, The *a Priori* of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in the Scientific Age," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy,* trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge & KeganPaul, 1980), p. 257.

[12] Karl-Otto Apel, "Is the Ethics of the Ideal Communication Community a Utopia? On the Relationship Between Ethics, Utopia, and the Critique of Utopia,"

tation, and judgment formed within the modern Western normative tradition."[9]

The charges advanced by Dews, Habermas, and Fraser, though not identical, have the same result. For the latter two, Foucault's rejection of Enlightenment values (or, as Habermas puts it, "modernity") undercuts the possibility of political critique. By embracing a stand wholly outside our context, Foucault bars himself from utilizing any of it for the purposes of furthering a political vision. Alternatively, insofar as Foucault would like to invest his analyses with a critical power, he is forced to abandon their motivating assumptions in order to do so. For Dews, the specific problem is not modernity but universality (a universality in the modernist ethical sense). By precluding all binding universal values, Foucault and Lyotard are also precluded from assessing any discourse or practice as oppressive or dominating. In either critique, however, the problem is that there is no place from which ethical judgment could arise: its possibility is inaccessible to the poststructuralist approach to political theory.

It is the perceived necessity to offer a foundational distinction between the acceptable and the unacceptable that motivates Habermas's and Karl-Otto Apel's discourse ethics. It will be recalled that Habermas began his reflections in the wake of the total critique of contemporary society articulated by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. The problem is that if all of capitalist society has been co-opted, then there is no place from which critique could arise. (It is worth noting the similarity between Adorno and Horkheimer's view of capitalism and the more contemporary Critical Theoretical interpretation of poststructuralist political theory.) The assumption of the ideal speech situation is part of Habermas's attempt to wrest a critical space from capitalist cooptation. In Chapter 2, above, we saw how the ideal speech situation functions politically; we shall look briefly here at how it functions ethically.

---

[9] Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," p. 284.

Text—imposing new delimitations upon them."[36] One of those powers, the Law, refers of course to the state and its practices. Gilles Deleuze, particularly in his collaboration with Felix Guattari, has offered the outlines of a micropolitical view of the state. I sketch this view in order to show an example of poststructuralist accounting of a macropolitical practice.

In order to understand Deleuze and Guattari's view of the state, we must recall that Deleuze operates with a metaphysical view that emphasizes the constitutive significance of unconscious forces. In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the state in their twelfth plateau counterposes the state to those forces which they call there the "nomadic" forces of the "war-machine." In Paul Patton's discussion of this plateau, he notes that "in its most general determination, the warmachine stands for that which is outside, the Other, of the State."[37] We can think of the "nomadic war-machine" as a concept similar to the concept of "desire" in *Anti-Oedipus,* a creative but deterritorialized force that can be appropriated in any number of ways. As such, nomadic war-machines are not tied to any given social arrangement; they are continuously creative, but their creativity is not naturally bound to any given types or categories of product. Such nomadism is central to Deleuze's thought, because it provides the possibility of conceiving new and different forms of practice, and thus of resisting current forms of identification as unwonted constraints. (In that way, "nomadism" is a conceptual analogue to Foucault's emphasis on the contingency of practices of self-knowledge and is related to the critique of capitalism, in Lyotard's later works, for trying to appropriate narratives that are pragmatically irreducible to it. The ethical implications of this line of thought regarding a valorization of difference, or at least unconstrained creativity, are discussed be-

---

[36] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 184.

[37] Patton, "Conceptual Politics and the War-Machine in *Mille Plateaux," Sub-Stance,* vol. 13, nos. 3–4 (1985): 69. This is an excellent article for understanding Deleuze and Guattari's view of the state.

low in Chapter 6.) The nomad wanders across the planet and is not bound to any given piece of territory. What makes such nomadism a war-machine is both the idea that in its creativity it destroys (it destroys as it creates, a Nietzschean motif) and the fact of its resistance to the state, with which it is always in an antitheti' cal relationship.

If the nomadic war-machine operates through creativity and unboundedness, the state-form works through parasitism and binding. (We shall use the term "state-form" rather than "state" for reasons that should become clear presently.) The purpose of the state-form is to bind all nomadism to certain structures, to make sure that its creativity does not overflow certain boundaries or certain identificatory categories. The state-form does not create but, rather, works on the creativity of the nomadic war-machine, channeling it along acceptable and well-regulated pathways. As Deleuze puts it elsewhere: "It is not that the apparatus of the State has no meaning; it has itself a very special function, in as much as it overcodes all the segments ['segments' can be thought of as partial determinations of a life], both those that it takes on itself at a given moment and those that it leaves outside. Or rather the apparatus of the State is a concrete assemblage which realizes the machine of overcoding a society."[38]

"Overcoding" is the mode by which the state-form attempts to regulate nomadic creativity. Earlier, in Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Guattari state that "*overcoding* is the operation that constitutes the essence of the State, and that measures both its continuity and its break with the previous formations: the dread of flows that would resist coding, but also the establishment of a new inscription that overcodes, and that makes desire into the property of the sovereign, even though he be the death instinct itself."[39] In overcoding, disparate practices are brought together under a single category or

_____

[38] Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues, p.* 129.

[39] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 199.

And it is on the question of acceptability that critics claim poststructuralism founders. Peter Dews writes that

> Foucault and Lyotard conceptualize political conflict in terms of a clash between two kinds of forces … on the assumption that an oppressive force is one which claims truth or universal validity for its standpoint... But although the universality of a principle does not in itself guarantee that absence of coercion, the rejection of universality is even less effective in this respect, since there is nothing to prevent the perspective of one minority from including its right to dominate others.[6]

Habermas, in a similar vein, claims that "Foucault resists the demand to take sides; he scoffs at the 'gauchist dogma' which contends that power is what is evil, ugly, sterile, and dead and that that upon which power is exercised is 'right, good, and rich.' For him, there is no 'right side.'"[7] Furthermore, there can be no right side for Foucault, because he calls into question the values by which he could justify any critical stand: "But if it is just a matter of mobilizing counter-power, of strategic battles and wily confrontations, why should we muster any resistance at all against this all-pervasive power circulating in the bloodstream of the body of modern society, instead of just adapting ourselves to it?"[8] As Nancy Fraser puts it: "[Foucault] fails to appreciate the degree to which the normative is embedded and infused throughout the whole of language at *every* level, and the degree to which, despite himself, his own critique has to make use of modes of description, interpre-

_____

[6] Dews. *Logics of Disintegration*, p. 217.

[7] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), p. 282. In some sense, the case we will make for a poststructuralist ethics tries to show that the second sentence of this quotation does not follow from the first.

[8] Ibid., pp. 283–84.

Second, if power is everywhere, then isn't the result of all resistance just another set of power relationships? One does not escape power by political intervention, one merely redistributes its effects. But if there are always to be power relationships, then what is the point of resistance? And if there is no point to resisting exercises of power, then poststructuralism as apolitical theory loses its point. In Nancy Fraser's words, "The problem is that Foucault calls too many different sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that. Granted, all cultural practices involve constraints. But these constraints are of a variety of different kinds and thus demand a variety of different normative responses."[4]

The latter point assumes that, for poststructuralists, power is inherently problematic and thus that the goal of political intervention is, insofar as possible, to eliminate it. That assumption is misplaced. Foucault, who is the direct object of these criticisms, replied by pointing out that "relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free onself… The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication [as it is for Habermas], but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination."[5] (It should be noted that Foucault here is using the term "ethics" to denote a practice of self-formation, while our use of the term is more traditional, referring to binding principles of conduct.)

That practices are often infused by relationships of power, then, constitutes no obstacle to a critical assessment of those relationships. The question is not whether or not there is power, but which relationships of power are acceptable and which are unacceptable.

---

[4] Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," Praxis International 1 (1981): 286.

[5] Foucault, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom" (1984 interview), in *The Final Foucault,* ed. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 18.

principle, and are given their comprehensibility as variations of that category or principle. What was different becomes merely another mode of the same. In this way, the proliferation of distinct practices produced by nomadic creativity is limited through the creation of a single standard or set of standards by which those practices are judged. Deleuze and Guattari discuss the use of the incest taboo as an overcoding principle of social relationships, relying on the research of structural anthropologists such as LeviStrauss, whose writings depicted the incest taboo as a principle guiding the circulation of women in a society. What is central, though, is not the specific principle itself but the fact of there being a principle of overcoding by which to appropriate and against which to judge the multifarious practices and products of nomadic creation.

It might seem at this point that the characteristics of the state-form are not peculiar to states. Deleuze and Guattari would agree, and this agreement forms the micropolitical core of their analysis. Overcoding is not unique to state apparatuses but occurs wherever social operations try to subsume large regions of practices under single principles or categories that are to act at once as modes of comprehension and standards of judgment of those practices.[40] That is why the state-form is described by Deleuze and Guattari as an "abstract machine" rather than a specific set of entities. And it is because the state-form is a description of a type of operation rather than a type of entity that the contraposition of state form and nomadic war-machine is part of what Paul Patton calls a "conceptual politics." Conceiving things in the manner of this opposition allows us to ask about the ways in which our own creativity is regulated, and perhaps compromised, and to consider modes of escape from this regulation. "The practical significance of the enterprise," writes Patton, "lies here: in the criteria it provides for the

---

[40] The distinction between state-forms as overcoders and specific states in which they are realized is more clearly drawn in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* than in their *Anti-Oedipus.*

evaluation of processes, individual as well as social, which make up our lives and our projects."[41]

This does not imply that the fact of overcoding must be resisted; as discussed above, evaluation is a subtle and complex affair. Rather, practices of overcoding must be studied in order to discover their effects, both creative and repressive, and in order to ask about alternatives they have left out of account. Only such study will allow the questions "What should we ratify?" and "What should we resist?" to be answered in a way that does not merely repeat the patterns of overcoding to which we have been subject (in both senses of the term "subject").

If the state-form is not peculiar to the state, though, in what sense is it a state-form? The reason lies in the peculiar efficacy of the state in utilizing overcoding and rendering its principles and categories societywide: "The abstract machine of overcoding ensures the homogenization of different segments, their convertibility, their translatability, it regulates the passages from one side to the other, and the prevailing force under which this takes place. It does not depend on the State, but its effectiveness depends on the State as the assemblage which realizes it in a social field."[42] The state is not the only operator of overcoding, but it is the operator that makes the operation stick. Overcoding does not find its source only in the state; it can arise at the micropolitical level as well as the macropolitical one. (Consider here Foucault's discussion of the emergence of the norm as the social category peculiar to

---

[41] Patton, "Conceptual Politics and the War-Machine in Mille Plateaux," p. 79. It might be thought that the idea of regulating creativity returns to the old humanist ideas of traditional anarchism that poststructuralism seeks to avoid. This would be a mistake, however. Creativity need not be thought of on the model of expression, particularly of expression of an essence, if there is anything essentialist here, it is Deleuze's metaphysics offorce; but such a metaphysics implies none of the humanist doctrines that poststructuralists reject. That seems to be part of the motivation for Deleuze and Guattari's use of animal, machinic, and geological terms when discussing projects humans engage in.

[42] Deleuze and Parnet, Dialogues, p. 129.

claim that justification cannot be had. The discussion proceeds in several stages. First of all, we understand the Critical Theoretical critique of poststructuralist anarchism. Then, we investigate the reluctance of poststructuralists to meet the critique. Finally, in the bulk of the present chapter I offer an ethical defense of poststructuralist discourse that will at the same time raise questions about the current Critical Theoretical project of "discourse ethics," the latter being a project that attempts to offer not only an ethical defense of a particular political perspective, but a foundation for all ethical discourse.

The Critical Theoretical argument against poststructuralism begins with the recognition that, for poststructuralists, power is both creative and pervasive. "For Foucault," writes Michael Walzer, "there is no focal point, but rather an endless network of power relations"[2] And Peter Dews: "[D]uring the 1970's Foucault's inclination is to play down the repressive and negative aspects of power and to present the operation of power as primarily positive and productive."[3] But if power is productive and pervasive, then one must wonder what justification there would be for resisting it, for two related (but not always clearly distinguished) reasons. First, if the ethical principles that are invoked to justify the resistance are themselves social creations, what justificatory force can they possess? Since the objects of criticism being criticized are social practices, and the ground of criticism is also a social practice (the social practice of ethical discourse), and since all social practices are products (at least in part) of power relationships, what is it about the social practice of ethical discourse that suggests we should hold it capable of passing judgment on other practices? On what grounds do we privilege ethics? And if we cannot privilege any ethical principles, how are we to justify political criticism?

---

[2] Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," in Foucault: A Critical Reader, ed. David Cousins Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 55.

[3] Peter Dews, Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralut Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory (London: Verso, 1987), pp. 161–62.

6. Questions of Ethics

Two questions have stalked poststructuralist discourse from its inception: Is it epistemically coherent? and Can it be ethically grounded? I have tried, with respect to Foucault, to answer the first question elsewhere.[1] The latter question has never received the attention it deserves.

Nowhere have these questions been pushed so persistently and with such rigor as by a group of theorists broadly associated with, though not in all cases participants in, the contemporary Critical Theoretical movement: Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser, Peter Dews, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer. The common thread of their critique is that poststructuralist discourse displays both a reticence toward and an inability to justify ethical principles. Their critique has been directed primarily at Foucault (although Dews also criticizes the early Lyotard); it is applicable, however, to the entire perspective that has been developed here. In order to redeem poststructuralism as a political theory, the argument runs, it must at least be capable of ethical defense. Since it precludes itself from such a defense, it fails as political theory. As evidence of such a preclusion, the critics both point to the reticence of poststructuralists to offer ethical justification for their political viewpoints and construct an argument that attempts to show that their political perspective cannot admit of such justification.

This chapter argues against both the poststructuralist reticence to offer ethical justification and the broadly Critical Theoretical

---

[1] In my text *Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology, Politics, and Knowledge in the Thought of Michel Foucault* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

---

psychological practice.) Without the state, however, such overcoding would probably not take hold, getting lost in the complexities and unfolding changes in the network of social practices. The state, by overcoding various social codes (and then codifying much—but not all—of the overcoding in written law), tries to ensure the continuance of some codes and the suppression of others, resulting in the appropriation, *and the creation,* of some practices and the marginalization or elimination of others.[43]

Yet this attempt is never completely successful: "[T]he very conditions that make the State or World war machine [which is a State warmachine, not a nomadic one] possible, in other words, constant capital (resources and equipment) and human variable capital, continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines."[44] Articulating the state in this way, Deleuze and Guattari can provide a view of the state's operation that is at once micropolitical and macropolitical. It is micropolitical because both the state-form and its ability to function do not derive solely from it: its form appears in other practices and institutions, and its ability to function depends upon the functioning of those other practices and institutions. However, it is also macropolitical, because the overcoding of the state, as the most general and effective overcoding operation, retains its own specificity which must be understood in its own terms as well as in terms of the codes it overcodes. It might be objected here that, though it may be micropolitical, this view of the state is hardly genealogical. This is partly true. Deleuze and Guattari do not provide a specific genealogy, because they do not provide a specific history. Rather, what they provide can be called a "theoretical" or, in Patton's word, "conceptual" genealogy of the state. They offer an outline of how a genealogist might go

---

[43] In fact, some of the practices that are created will have as their goal to marginalize or eliminate other practices.

[44] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 422.

about discussing the state, as abstract machine rather than institution, instantiated not only at the macropolitical but also at the micropolitical level, reliant upon local practices that sustain it, and offering always the possibility of escape from the overcoding it attempts to impose. Such outlines do not constitute a history, but they do provide a way of thinking about the historical facts of a macropolitical practice that is in keeping with the anarchist framework poststructuralism attempts to construct.

Lyotard, though writing at a distance from historical concerns of emergence, has offered in *The Differend* a view of language's operation that is in keeping with the genealogical and, more generally, poststructuralist approach to political thought. Language, for Lyotard, is a set of practices, irreducible in genre to one another, that intersect not only with one another but with other, nonlinguistic practices to create still other practices, both linguistic and nonlinguistic. In other words, what Lyotard offers is not a historical genealogy but instead a time-slice picture of a network of practices that fall under the general rubric of "language." Thus, he seeks not for the essence of language, but for instances of it. And, in keeping with the dictum of Deleuze and Guattari's Anti*Oedipus,* he does not ask "What does it mean?" but "How does it work?"[45] Lyotard summarizes his approach in *The* Postmodern Condi*tion:* "I have favored a certain procedure: emphasizing facts of language and in particular their pragmatic aspect."[46]

Lyotard appeals to Kant's Third Critique in discussing the distinct linguistic practices that comprise language. There Kant offers the metaphor of the "archipelago" of different genres of discourse (for Kant, those genres are specifically the cognitive and the ethical), in which the role of judgment is to navigate among

structuralist anarchism places much more weight on specific analyses and interventions than traditional political theory.

From another angle, however, there remain questions as yet unanswered by poststructuralist theorists. If we are to valorize experimentation, which experiments are to be judged political successes and which ones failures? Which concrete spaces of freedom ought we try to create? Which subjugated discourses ought we to promote, and which are better left unsupported? Which struggles should an intellectual lend his or her analytical abilities to? These questions are not political, but moral. They ask not for programmatic articulation, but for ethical defense. The problem here is not to offer an inventory of specific answers to the questions raised—the contingency of practices would render such an inventory moot in short order. Rather, what must be addressed are the principles of evaluation without which political intervention remains blind.

The problem is twofold. First, and least troubling, is the question of what ethical principles poststructuralists support. Although Deleuze, Lyotard, and Foucault were notoriously reticent *vis-à-vis* that question, we argue that they needn't have been. Second, however, is the question of whether poststructuralism admits of an ethics at all. In a discourse that emphasizes the local and the contingent, is there room for principles of evaluation that are, if they are not to be mere personal reactions to situations, universal in scope?

---

[45] See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus,* esp. pp. 16–22.

[46] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* p. 9. Compare Deleuze and Guattari: "Linguistics is nothing without a pragmatics (semiotic or political) to define the effectuation of the *condition of possibility* of language and the *usage* of linguistic elements" (*A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 85).

notes that "for many people, philosophy is something which is not 'made', but is pre-existent, ready-made in a prefabricated sky. However, philosophical theory is itself a practice, just as much as its object. It is a practice of concepts, and it must be judged in the light of other practices with which it interferes."[61] Third, the conception of the intellectual as vanguard is grounded in a representational picture of political intervention, one that is abandoned with the rejection of essentialism about human nature and the recognition of the effects of representational ism in political theory.

For poststructuralists, the role of the intellectual consists in a participation in theoretical struggles that are local or regional rather than universal. The intellectual offers analyses to those alongside whom he or she struggles, rather than sacred truths on tablets passed down to the oppressed. Deleuze, in a conversation with Foucault, once remarked that "a theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself."[62] And Foucault, in another text, cites the circumscribed role of the intellectual: "The intellectual no longer has to play the role of an advisor. The project, tactics and goals to be adopted are a matter for those who do the fighting. What the intellectual can do is provide the instruments, and at the present time this is the historian's essential role. What's effectively needed is a ramified, penetrative perception of the present... a topological and geological survey of the battlefield— that is the intellectual's role."[63]

In conclusion, these four political recommendations begin to sketch a perspective within which to think about political action in the context of the anarchist project of a tactical-progressive political philosophy. These suggestions can be developed, but at the theoretical level there is a limitation to their development, for post-

_____

[61] Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-lmage*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 280.

[62] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," p. 208.

[63] Foucault, "Body/Power" (1975), in *Power/Knowledge,* p. 62.

them successfully without reducing one to another. In Lyotard's words: "Each genre of discourse would be like an island; the faculty of judgment would be, at least in part, like an admiral or like a provisioner of ships who would launch expeditions from one island to the next, intended to present to one island what was found (or invented, in the archaic sense of the word) in the other, and which might serve the former as an 'as-if intuition' with which to validate it."[47] The practice of judgment, then, is not one of proper subsumption of genres of discourse but, rather, one of balancing discourses, setting them in play with one another, invoking them at the proper time, and so on.[48]

Lyotard's term "genre" corresponds, in the terms we have been using, to "linguistic practice." A genre is a practice of language, containing rules for moves that make sense only within the context of that genre. In that sense, as Lyotard points out, genres are like Wittgenstein's "language games."[49] Although Lyotard does not offer a succinct definition of a genre, his descriptions of genres make clear that they include rules for which linguistic (and, at times, non-linguistic) phrases (or moves) can follow others, what the stakes are in certain phrases as opposed to others, and what the goals or finalities of that genre are. What lends genres their political nature is that when one speaks, one's words do not by themselves determine the response to be given to them: in Lyotard's terms, there is no linking of phrases that is determined by the phrases themselves.

_____

[47] Lyotard, The *Differend,* pp. 130–31.

[48] For a more detailed reading of Kant as a proto-anarchist philosopher, see my "Kant the Liberal, Kant the Anarchist: Rawlsand Lyotard on Kantian Justice," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 4 (1990): 525–18.

[49] For this debt to Wittgenstein, see Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 10. In *The Differend,* Lyotard distances himself from the concept of language games because he thinks Wittgenstein has too anthropomorphic a conception of them—broadly, he believes that Wittgenstein has made them sound too much like games dictated by players' intentions to win (for this, see pp. 55 and 129–30). I think the accusation of anthropomorphism against Wittgenstein is misplaced, but it does enlighten us about Lyotard's own view of genres.

Thus, phrases by themselves are not constituent parts of genres, which are, rather, the rules for linkage. And since no rule of linkage is given by a phrase, which linkage is made is a matter of which genre is to be invoked: "[A] phrase that comes along is put into play within a conflict between genres of discourse... The multiplicity of stakes, on a par with the multiplicity of genres, turns every linkage into a kind of 'victory' of one of them over the others. These others remain neglected, forgotten, or repressed possibilities."[50] There are, then, not only stakes within genres but also stakes between them—specifically, the question of which stakes will be at stake at a given time. No practice of language can circumvent this political problem, for it is always a matter of choosing genres: that is to say, choosing appropriate rules of linkage between phrases.

The problem would be resolvable if the stakes of one genre could be redeemed in another. But they cannot. The genre most often held to be the dominant one, the genre into which the stakes of other genres are wont to be translated, is the cognitive genre, whose exemplar is science. Lyotard, however, devotes much of the early portion of *The Differend* to arguing that, in its descriptions or its references, the cognitive genre possesses no privileged relationship to reality that can ground its claim to being a naturally dominant genre. In fact, claims Lyotard, the nature of reference and description is such that it makes more sense to abandon altogether the very idea of a "relationship to reality." In all phrases, a world is "presented" to us, but the presenting itself has always already happened when we grasp the presented; we have no access to it. The phrase puts us in a world, and it makes no sense to seek a silent, prelinguistic world outside of all phrases with which to compare phrases in order to see whether they match or how they hook up. We are always in the world of phrases—always in language. The question of linguistic practice, then, is not one

from repression. Practices, both oppressive and liberating, are creations, not mere expressions of a human nature or derivations from a fundamental or transcendental principle of exploitation. We have already seen that knowledge both about and within these practices is also political, and we will see that the ethical principles of evaluation are no less so. These are the lessons of genealogy. Situated freedom, then, should not be thought of as an empty space to be filled with alternative practices, but rather as a struggle against specific oppressive practices that allows other practices to be created. As Foucault said, "Liberty is a practice."[60] Subjugated discourses should not be thought of as expressions of a human nature that are repressed by power but, rather, as practices that are oppressed by other practices through a variety of mechanisms: denial, appropriation, marginalization, even fetishizing. Moreover, this oppression should not be thought of as necessarily conspiratorial (although it can be in some cases), but most often as a contingent effect of different practices interacting with one another and coming into relationships of power through those interactions.

Finally, the role of the intellectual, as a participant in theoretical practices rather than an observer of practice, is reoriented in poststructuralist theory. In strategic theory, the intellectual is part of the vanguard party; his or her function is to articulate the nature of oppression, its principles, and the routes of escape. Poststructuralist theory rejects this function for three reasons. First, the contingency of the effects of practices rules out the possibility of understanding oppression to arise on the basis of a single—or small set—of principles that it can be the task of anyone to understand. Second, since theory is itself a practice, and thus subject to its own genealogical investigation, the distinction between knowledge and politics that legitimates the role of the intellectual is called into question. Knowledge is not above or outside practice but is itself a practice that cannot be judged in isolation from its effects. Deleuze

---

[50] Lyotard, *The Differend,* p. 136.

[60] Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," in The *Foucault Reader,* p. 245.

valorization (e.g., the valorization of Sade's discourse by Bataille and Klossowski) can be seen as a remnant of the earlier transgressive view of political action, it need not be; and Lyotard especially has called attention to its possibilities (although Deleuze's discussions of becoming-minor and Foucault's work on madness, the sick, and the imprisoned fall clearly within this valorization). This is not only in The *Differend,* where the pragmatics of language Lyotard offers leads to an understanding of wrongness as the exclusion or appropriation of one genre by another, but also in his earlier text *The* Postmodern Condition. There, he describes the subjugation of narrative knowledge by a scientific knowledge that cannot legitimate itself without recourse to the narrative knowledge it seeks to replace. Although the narratives that have served to legitimate science that Lyotard recounts—the Enlightenment's heroic narrative of the liberation of knowledge from the bonds of ignorance and the Hegelian narrative of the gradual self-realization of spirit—have failed in their goal, this failure does not subvert the role narratives play in both the legitimation and self-constitution of a people. Lyotard suggests that if many little narratives, rather than one grand one, were allowed to flourish, this would offer the possibility of many legitimations of many practices rather than the valorizing of some at the expense of others. Further, he suggests that science itself is providing narrative possibilities with such discoveries as the uncertainty principle and Gödel's incompleteness proof. Contemporary science "is producing not the known but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy."[59]

In regard to the creation of situated freedom and the release of subjugated discourses, it is important to recognize that poststructuralist political theory is not returning here to a model of power as repression and, cor relatively, to a view of liberation as release

of finding the "true" genre to reduce others to, but one of picking each time the appropriate genre for the linking of phrases.

But since the choice of any genre excludes all other choices and their stakes, there is with every linkage both a creation and a suppression. The term Lyotard uses to describe this situation is "differend." He explains: "As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments."[51] Lyotard's memorable illustration of a differend occurs in his discussion of the "revisionist" historian Robert Faurisson's denial of the Jewish holocaust. Since the rules of evidence demanded by Faurisson were firsthand witnesses to the ovens, and since almost no one who had seen the ovens would be able to bear witness to them, Faurrison concluded that there was no reliable evidence for the existence of the ovens. This genre—a parody, but for Lyotard perhaps not parodic enough—of the cognitive genre denied to the living victims and to the families of murdered victims their ability to render their experience of the holocaust; there was a differend between the genre Faurisson invoked and the genre of phrasing the searing memory and pain invoked by the victims.

The political problem of genres, for Lyotard, attaches not merely to the ineluctability of differends, but to the effects of suppression that occur when some differends dominate at the expense of others. This precludes the possibility not of phrasings (because phrasings are not part of genres), but of linking phrases in ways that legitimate certain claims, experiences, or creations. Such a denial Lyotard calls a "wrong" (*tort*): "a damage accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage."[52] The domination, in mid-twentieth-century philosophy, of a verificationist philosophy

[59] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p. 60.

[51] Ibid.p. xi.
[52] Ibid, p. 5.

of language that denied semantic legitimacy to ethical discourse could be seen as an example of such a wrong.

Wrongs can occur at both the micropolitical level (Faurisson's attempt to wrong the victims of the holocaust can be seen as an example of a micropolitical wrong) or at the macropolitical level. As an example of the latter, Lyotard speaks near the end of *The Differend* of capitalism's effect of privileging an economic genre of self-interest, efficiency, and productivity, a genre that (among its other consequences) attempts to squeeze so much into a given unit of time that among its victims is the reflective activity of philosophy. (It is worth noting, however, that even this case of macropolitical domination, which sounds close to Habermas's description of our linguistic situation under capitalism, remains distinct from the latter in its refusal of the idea that capitalism forms the principle of linguistic domination. At most, capitalism is a larger force in an interplay offorces that are irreducible to it, analogous in that sense to Deleuze's view of the state.) In any case, this description of language, which emphasizes pragmatics rather than semantics or syntactics, which sees linguistic practices (genres) as contingently given, irreducible, and intersecting, which cites the micropolitical power relationships that arise among them in a way that illustrates how macropolitical relationships depend upon them, and which lends itself to a historical genealogy of the dominance of certain genres, demonstrates how the politics of linguistic practice can be analyzed in accord with a poststructuralist political perspective.

The question these analyses, and others like them, summon is the following. Given that the old answers to political problems—appropriating the means of production, seizing or eliminating the state, destroying all relationships of power—are found to be lacking, what perspective can poststructuraHst theory offer for thinking about political change as well as power and political oppression? In part, the answer to this question is, for poststructuralists, impossible "in general," because their analyses try to demonstrate that power and oppression do not operate "in general." In the next

a space of concrete freedom, i.e., a space of possible transformation.[58]

The theme of situated freedom harkens back to Merleau-Ponty, but for the poststructuralists it is put to very different use. For Merleau-Ponty, situated freedom is a metaphysical condition of subjectivity that derives from the fact that we cannot, *contra* the early Sartre, entirely determine ourselves. For the poststructuralists, alternatively, situated freedom is a product of two political conditions. The first derives from the fact that all practices occur within the context of networks of practices and are thus subject to the power relationships within those networks. The second derives from the fact that metaphysical talk about human essences, either as free or determined or even as situatedly free, participates in the problems of humanism described in the critique of traditional anarchism above.

The expansion of situated freedom is of a piece with the idea of political intervention as experimentation. Political practice tries to carve out spaces that allow the possibility of alternative practices. In expanding situated freedom, one might not be engaging directly in those practices themselves, but instead creating room for the engagement to occur. Struggling for gay rights, for example, might not constitute on its own an experiment in alternative lifestyles (although in certain of its forms of struggle it might), but, if successful, it creates a space for those alternatives which themselves may have the effect of detaching us from our commitment to the "naturalness" of heterosexual monogamy. The creation of situated freedom, then, should be seen as of a piece with, if not always the same as, experimenting with alternative practices.

Another political intervention fostered by poststructuralist theory is the valorization of subjugated discourses. Although such a

---

[58] Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," an interview with Gerard Raulet, in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (London: Routledge. 1988), p. 36.

the stems of the social rhizome that in the same gesture entangles dominant stems and is a positive possibility for practice. Regarding language, Deleuze and Guattari claim that "it is certainly not by using a minor language as a dialect, by regionalizing it or ghettoizing, that one becomes revolutionary; rather, by using a number of minority elements, by connecting, conjugating them, one invents a specific, unforeseen, autonomous becoming."[57] Becomingsminor can be aesthetic (Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka articulates his work as a becoming-minor of literature), racial, cultural, feminist, and so on. All of these routes form possibilities for experimenting with practices whose effects may be liberating for the members of a society. They are routes based on practices that already exist, and they must be utilized only in order to become politically effective. That utilization, however, must remain a "minor" one: the task of becoming-minor is precisely that; it is not a task of making the minor dominant.

If experimenting is a privileged form of political practice, that is because, as Foucault has seen, the project of political action is not total liberation from oppression, but an expanding of local spaces of situated freedom:

> I would like to say something about the functions of any diagnosis concerning the nature of the present. It does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are but, instead—by following lines of fragility in the present—in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might no longer be that-which-is. In this sense, any description must always be made in accordance with these kinds of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as

chapter, I try to isolate some general ethical principles that underlie the poststructuralist view of political action; those principles, I argue, can be held "in general" without violating the political framework of poststructuralism *(pace* the pronouncements on the impossibility of a poststructuralist ethics made by poststructuralists themselves). Yet, even in the realm of political action, some of the general guidelines offered by Deleuze, Lyotard, and Foucault are consonant with a political perspective that emphasizes the local, intersecting, and contingent nature of political relationships. These guidelines include the call for social, personal, and political experimentation, the expansion of situated freedom, the release of subjected discourses and genres, and the limitation and reorientation of the role of the intellectual.

Deleuze's concepts of experimentation, and especially of "lines of flight," reflect a theme that preoccupies poststructuralist political thought: "This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of land at all times."[53] For Deleuze, as for Foucault and Lyotard, the activity of political reflection must have as a primary goal the freeing of an individual (be that individual a person, a group, or a practice) for new practices, practices that change, undermine, or abandon the power relationships that keep old practices in place. Foucault addresses the same concern in his description of philosophical "curiosity":

> not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself... There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their

---

[57] Deleuze and Guattari, A *Thousand Plateaus,* p. 106.

[53] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* p. 161.

truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it.[54]

In Lyotard, too, the theme of experimentation figures centrally. Earlier, his critique of representation sought to open up possibilities for action that would elude the dominance of current signifying practices. And his appeal, over the past decade-and-some of his thought, to Emmanuel Levinas's reflections on Judaism and especially the latter's discussion of an ethical realm that is irreducible to any ontology, issues precisely in the call to construct practices that are alternatives to what is presented us. Throughout Lyotard's writings, practices of art have always constituted a privileged field for experimentation: "[A] poet is a man in a position to hold language—even if he uses it—under suspicion, i.e. to bring about figures which would never have been produced, that Ianguage might not tolerate, and which may never be audible, perceptible, for us."[55]

Experimentation is the activity of trying out something else, something that may get one free of the feeling of necessity and ineluctability that attaches to practices one has been brought up on. It is crucial to understand, however, that experimentation is distinct from simply transgressing the boundaries of practice that are put before one. Although Lyotard, Foucault, and Deleuze were all, at early moments in their philosophical careers, taken with the idea of transgression in such writers as Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski, they gradually moved away from it toward

a notion of experimentation. Deleuze explains that the concept of transgression remains tied to the very significations against which it transgresses: "The signifier is always the little secret which has never stopped hanging around mummy and daddy... The little secret is generally reducible to a sad narcissistic and pious masturbation: the phantasm! 'Transgression', a concept too good for seminarists under the law of a Pope or a priest."[56] Experimentation, unlike transgression, seeks positive alternatives rather than revolt. Such an activity is more in keeping with a perspective that defines power not as a repressive force exercised from above, but as a feature of all social relationships. The task of a poststructuralist politics is to attempt to construct power relationships that can be lived with, not to overthrow power altogether.

As such, experimentation is a sober and often tentative activity. One experiments by constructing practices that one is prepared to abandon if their effects are intolerable. The recognition of contingency that inhabits networks of practices brings in its wake another recognition: practices that seem liberating may, because of unexpected interactions with or developments of other practices, have consequences very different from those imagined by their initiators. There is no blueprint for practice. The ethical principles that help one to judge practice remain; but one can only experiment in their realization.

One such experimentation, discussed by Deleuze, is that of "becoming minor." It is a concept best understood as engaging in a practice that, while within the social network of practices and thus not transgressing that network, occupies a place that disrupts dominant practices by showing creative possibilities within those practices which would escape the political oppressions associated with them. To engage in a becoming-minor is to construct a line of flight within the social network by constructing—or following—one of

---

[54] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 8–9.

[55] Lyotard, "Notes on the Critical Function of the Work of Art" (1970), trans. Susan Hanson, in *Driftways,* ed. Roger McKeon (New York: Semiotextfe], 1984), p. 79.

[56] Deleuze and Parnet, Dialogue, p. 47

Todd May
The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism
1994

establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination."[26]

Where poststructuralists went astray was in making the inference from the problems of telling people who they are to alleged problems of telling people what—at least in some cases—they ought to do. This inference involves two slippages in poststructuralist thought. In resisting an essentialism about human nature, there may have been a resistance to telling people not only what they want but also what they ought to want. The antirepresentationalist principle, however, does not even involve what people ought to want, but rather what they ought to do, what practices they ought and ought not engage in. The further slippage, then, may be from resisting telling people what they ought to want to resisting telling them what they ought to do. I am arguing here that it is the latter resistance that is incoherent.

The unacceptability of ought-claims about wants does not follow from the unacceptability of is-claims about wants; but poststructuralism need not even be concerned with what people ought to want. Since the poststructuralists' ethical problem is with practices of representing people to themselves, they need only balk at those practices, not at any motivation to uphold or to resist them. Where they must form an ethical commitment, and this is a commitment in keeping with poststructuralist political theory, is at the level of practice. Some practices are acceptable, some unacceptable. The latter, included among them representationalist practices, ought not to be engaged in.

One might argue here that what poststructuralism resists is not representation *per se,* but only a specific kind of representation: "normalization."[27] Normalization is, as its name implies, a practice of defining what is normal in a group and attempting to hold peo-

---

[26] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 138.

[27] I am indebted to Professor Thomas Dumm for raising this possibility and forcing me to clarify my position relative to it.

ple to that norm. Foucault deals with normalization extensively in Discipline *and* Punish, linking it—as seen in Chapter 5, above—with the emergence of psychological discourse and practice. Although many of the interventions of poststructuralism seem directed against the power and effects of normalization, it would be a mistake to see normalization as the only object of its ethical sanction. Other institutions, for instance, represent people to themselves in ways that do not involve normalization but that would nonetheless violate the antirepresentationalist principle espoused by Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard. An example of this is the power exercised by the sovereign in the period preceding the rise of normalization. The torture of Damiens described by Foucault in the opening pages of Discipline and Punish involves a representation of the bodies and powers of both the king and his subjects. It is a representation designed to discourage deviance and to ensure obedience; and it is presented by Foucault with no more sympathy than modern practices of normalization. What is disturbing about the contrast Foucault draws between preclassical and modern forms of representation, in fact, is the similarity in effects of very different kinds of practices. The point is not that earlier forms of representation, bound to practices of torture, are ethically defensible and that as a culture we have degenerated by adopting normalization in their stead. Rather, it is that both normalization and earlier forms of representation have more or less the same deleterious effects upon those subject to them: the latter in spectacular and terroristic ways, the former in insidious and bureaucratic ones.

The poststructuralists' commitment to a principle of antirepresentation is bound to their commitment to another ethical principle: that alternative practices, all things being equal, ought to be allowed to flourish and even to be promoted.[28] This principle ap-

---

[28] Stephen White has referred to something like this principle in his book Political *Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). He claims that "postmodernism" emphasizes a "responsibility to otherness," which he distinguishes from the more traditional notion of a "responsibility

Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. The General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century, trans. John Beverley Robinson. London: Freedom Press, 1923.

Railton, Peter. "Moral Realism.' Philosophical Review, vol. 95. no. 2 (1986): 163–207.

Rawls, John. A Theory of Justice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Rousseu, Jean-Jacques. The Social Contract [I752], trans. Maurice Cranston. Middlesex: Penguin, 1968.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness [1943], trans. Hazel Barnes. New York: Pocket Books, 1956.

———. A Critique of Dialectical Reason [1960], trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith. London: New Left Books. 1976.

Sayrer-McCord, Geoffrey, ed. Essays on Moral Realism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Sellars, Wilfrid. Science, Perception and Reality. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

Smart, J.C.C., and Bernard Williams. Utilitarianism: For and Against. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Thomas, Paul. Karl Marx and the Anarchists. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

Ward, Colin. Anarchy in Action. London: Allen 5' Unwin, 1973.

White, Stephen. Political Theory and Postmodernism. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Wiggins. David. Needs, Values, Truth. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. Culture and Value, ed. G. H. von Wright; trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Woodcock, George. Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements. Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1962.

———. ed. The Anarchist Reader. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977.

pears in different ways in each of our three thinkers, but in each it occupies a prominent place. It forms the core of the poststructuralist insistence upon difference. Lyotard's project of protecting different genres by citing the differends that are created between them attempts to protect certain genres (e.g., the ethical) from the intrusion of others. Although it will be seen below that Lyotard's own articulation of the ethical genre is itself too much under the sway of the cognitive, it remains the case that the phenomenon he cites of reducing the ethical to the cognitive is a philosophical project with a long history. (A more recent part of that history involves rejecting the ethical outright if it fails to conform to the rules of cognitive discourse.) Thus, "The purposiveness that the twentieth century has witnessed has not consisted, as Kant had hoped, of securing fragile passages above abysses. Rather, it has consisted of filling up those abysses at the cost of the destruction of whole worlds of names... Capital is that which wants a single language and a single network, and it never stops trying to present them."[29]

Gilles Deleuze's commitment to promoting different ways of thinking and acting is a central aspect of his thought. As early as his book on Nietzsche, he draws Nietzsche's distinction between affirmation and negation as qualities of the will to power this way: "Negation is opposed to affirmation but affirmation *differs*

---

to act." White defends this notion of responsibility against claims that postmodernism rejects talk of responsibility altogether, saying that what postmodernism actually rejects are traditional ethical notions associated with the responsibility to act. It is unclear however, how one can be responsible to otherness without that responsibility impinging in various ways on how one acts. It is more fruitful, I think, to admit that what is at issue are traditional ethical questions of how to act; what is new in what he calls "postmodernism" (a term he uses to cover more ground than my term "poststructuralism") are some of the answers to those questions The responsibility to otherness, then, should not be seen as an alternative to the responsibility to act, but instead as one central principle guiding that latter responsibility.

[29] Lyotard, "Judiciousness in Dispute, or Kant after Marx," trans. Cecile Lindsay, in *The Aims of Representation,* ed. Murray Krieger (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 64.

from negation... Affirmation is the enjoyment and play of its own difference."[30] Deleuze thus draws the distinction between Nietzsche and Hegel as that between a thinker who privileges creation of the new and a thinker for whom all the seemingly new must be brought back into the play of sameness by "the labor of the negative." For Deleuze's Nietzsche, the master is not the one who achieves the recognition of the slave, but the one who dismisses the project of recognition altogether, in order to create something new. What characterizes the slave, then, is not the failure to obtain recognition, but the attempt to elicit it.

The promotion of alternative practices appears throughout Deleuze's texts. For instance, in his recent collaborative work with Felix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* Deleuze says of philosophy that it "is a constructivism, and its constructivism possesses two complementary aspects which differ in nature: creating concepts and tracing a plane."[31] (For Deleuze and Guattari, concepts are defined by their effects, and planes are the fields on which concepts play out those effects.) Thus, philosophical practice is a practice of creating effects rather than one of attaining truths, which entails both that philosophy is at every point ethical and that the ethical assessment of its effects is inseparable from an assessment of the alternative ways of thinking that its creation of concepts offers.

Foucault, too, particularly in some of his last writings, speaks of fashioning alternative practices of self-formation that will create new and unforeseen possibilities for living. In reflecting on his own purposes for his investigations, he writes: "As for what motivated me, it is quite simple: I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself It was curiosity ... not the kind of curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for

---

[30] Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 188.
[31] Deleuze and Guattari, *Sy'esi-ce que la* philosophic? (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1991), p. 38.

164

———. 'Virtue and Reason.' The Monist 62 (1979): 331–50.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. The Prince and Selected Discourses, trans. Daniel Donno. New York: Bantam Books, 1966.

Marcuse, Herbert. One-Dimensional Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.

Martin, Luther H., Huck Gutrnan, and Patrick H. Hutton. Technologies ofthe Self Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

May, Todd. Between Genealogy and Epistemology: Psychology. Politics. and Knowledge in the Thought ofMichel Foucault. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

———. "Kant the Liberal, Kant the Anarchist: Rawls and Lyotard on Kantian Justice." The Southern journal of Philosophy 28, no. 4 (1990): 525–38.

———. "The Politics of Life in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze," SubStance 20, no. 3 (1991): 24–35.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Adventures of the Dialectic [1955], trans. Joseph Bein. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Negri, Antonio. Marx Beyond Marx, trans. Harry Cleaver, Michael Ryan, and Maurizio Viano. South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1984.

———. The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza's Metaphysics and Politics [1981], trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

Nozick, Robert. Anarchy, State, and Utopia. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

Patton, Paul. "Conceptual Politics and the War—Machine in Mille Plateaux.' Sub' Stance 13, nos. 3/4 (1985): 61–80.

Pecora, Vincent. "Deleuze's Nietzsche and Post—Structuralist Thought." SubStance 14, no. 4 (1986): 34–50.

Poulantzas, Nicos. State, Power, Socialism, trans. Patrick Camiller. London: New Left Books, 1978.

197

———. Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets. ed. Roger N. Baldwin. New York: Dover. 1970.

———. Mutual Aid: A Factor ofEvolution. London: Heinernann, 1902. Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack. London: Verso, 1985. Lenin.

Lukács. Georg. History and Class Consciousness [1968], trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971.

Luxernburg, Rosa. The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism? Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. "Beyond Representation' [1974]. Human Context 7 (1975): 495–502.

———.The Differend: Phrases in Dispute [1983], trans. Georges van den Abbeele. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

———. Driftworks, ed. Roger McKeon. New York: Semiotext(e). 1984.

———. Economic libidinale. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit. 1974.

———. "Energumen Capitalism.' Semiotext(e) 2, no. 3 (1977): 11–26.

———. Phenomenology [lst ed. 1954], 10th ed.. trans. Gayle Ormiston. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991.

———.The Postmodern Condition [1979]. trans. Geofl'Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-Frangois, and Jean-Loup Thebaud. just Gaming [1979], trans. Wlad Godzich. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

McClellan, David. Marxism After Marx. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

McDowell, John. "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" Proceedings ofthe Aristotelian Society, supp. (1978): 13–29.

———. "Projection and Truth in Ethics." The Lindley Lecture. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1987.

one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself."[32] As if to underscore the point as a general one, he continues a bit below: "There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it."[33]

This last quotation indicates the relationship between poststructuralism's antirepresentationalist principle and the principle of protecting or even promoting difference. It also gives a motivation for considering the stronger version of the second principle—promoting difference—rather than merely the weaker one of protecting it. Given the naturalness with which much of our current practice, especially our practices of knowledge, appears to us, if we are to alter or even destroy some of the relationships of power that they create, it may be necessary not only to allow already constituted alternative practices to flourish but, beyond that, to encourage their appearance.

The objection could be raised here, however, that difference by itself is not enough to ensure nonoppressive practices. Poststructuralism needs to offer an account of which differences, which alternative practices, ought to be encouraged and which ought be discouraged. Otherwise, Dews's charge that Lyotard allows for the possibility of ratifying oppressive discourses will continue to lack an adequate response.

In order to address this objection, it must be borne in mind that the two ethical principles to which poststructuralists have called attention—antirepresentationalism and the promotion of difference—are not the only two ethical principles to which they

---

[32] Foucault, The *History of Sexuality,* Vol. 2: **The** Use *ofPleasure,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), p. 8.
[33] Ibid., 2:9.

subscribe. Throughout their writings, generally accepted ethical principles are invoked to justify political positions. Lyotard, for example, assumes in *The Differend* the ethical value that the holocaust was evil, and he offers the principle that provision must be made for keeping the memory of it alive. For Foucault, the system of social security in France has had among its negative effects that of undercutting personal autonomy.[34] Among current practices of political resistance that Deleuze cites as causes for hope are those where "the nature of the demands … become qualitative as well as quantitative ('quality of life' rather than 'standard of living')."[35]

Moreover, there is a generally anticapitalist sentiment among poststructuralists that is ethically based. For Deleuze, the development of capitalism's world market has had this among its effects: "[T]he means of exploitation, control and surveillance have become more and more subtle and diffuse, and in a certain sense molecular (the workers of rich countries necessarily take part in the over-exploitation of the Third World, men take part in the over-exploitation of women, etc.)."[36] Lyotard notes that capitalism, by trying always to "gain time," inhibits the reflection necessary to think critically about oneself and one's society.[37] Foucault claims that those who engage in micropolitical struggles "naturally enter as allies of the proletariat, because power is exercised the way it is in order to maintain capitalist exploitation."[38] One may disagree that capitalism in fact promotes exploitative relationships or inhibits critical thought without rejecting the ethical principles that

---

[34] See Foucault, "Social Security," in Politics, Philosophy. Culture, ed. Lawrence Kriuman (London: Routledge, 1988), esp. pp. 159–61.

[35] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, Dialogues, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Hair berjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). p. 147

[36] Ibid., p. 146.

[37] Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute,* trans. Georges van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. xv and 176–78.

[38] Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" (1972), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice,* ed. Donald F. Bouchard; trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 216.

———. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures [1985], trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987.

———. The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 1: Reason and the Rationalization ofSociety [1981], trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

———. The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason [1985], trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Harman, Gilbert. The Nature ofMorality. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Hendley, Steven. "Judgment and Rationality in Lyotard's Discursive Archipelago." The Southern Journal of Philosophy 29, no. 2 (1991): 227–44.

Hirsch, Arthur. The French New Left. Boston: South End Press, 1981.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. Dialectic of Enlightenment [1947]. New York: Seabury Press, 1972.

Hoy, David Cousins, ed. Foucault: A Critical Reader. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.

Jay, Martin. The Dialectical Imagination. Boston: Little, Brown 6' Co., 1971.

Johnson, Richard. The French Communist Party Versus the Students: Revolutionary Politics in May-June 1968. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.

Joll, James. The Anarchists. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Kant, Immanuel. The Metaphysical Elements ofjustice. trans. John Ladd. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 1965.

Kellner. Douglas. Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Krieger. Murray, ed. The Aims ofRepresentation. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Kropothin, Peter. The Conquest of Bread. ed. Paul Avrich. New York: New York University Press, 1972.

———. Foucault Live, ed. Sylvere Lotringer. New York: Semiotext(e), I989.

———. The Foucault Reader, ed. Paul Rabinow; trans. Catherine Porter. New York: Pantheon, 1984.

———. The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: An Introduction [1976], trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.

———. The History of Sexuality. Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure [1984], trans. Robert Hurley. New York Pantheon, I985.

———. Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, ed. Donald F. Bouchard; trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

———. The Order of Things [1966]. New York: Random House, 1970.

———. Politics, Philosophy, Culture, ed. Lawrence Kritzman. London: Routledge, 1988.

———. Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon, 1980.

Fraser, Nancy. "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions." Praxis International 1 (1981): 272–87.

Fukuyama. Francis. "The End of History?" The National Interest 16 (1989): 3–18.

Gauthier, David. Morals by Agreement. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Gramsci, Antonio. Selections from the Prison Notebooks, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Grover, Dorothy, Joseph Camp,]r., and Nuel Belnap, Jr. "The Prosentential Theory of Truth." Philosophical Studies 27 (1975): 73–125.

Habermas, Jürgen. Legitimation Crisis [1973], trans. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.

———. Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action [1983], trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.

exploitation and inhibition of thought are ethically unacceptable. These latter principles are both commonplace and uncontroversial. Moreover, as indicated above in citing the second motivation for poststructuralism's antirepresentationalist ethical principle, part of the reason representation is unacceptable to poststructuralists is that among its effects is to reinforce other oppressive relationships. These values and principles interact with the two principles promoted by poststructuralist theory, forcing a balance that nuances antirepresentationalist commitments (particularly commitments to promoting difference) and prevents them from becoming absolute principles of action. Thus, the importance of the caveats "as much as possible" and "all things being equal" in the articulation of the principles.

If poststructuralism ratifies some generally accepted ethical principles, however, this does not imply either that it ratifies them all or that its analyses do not steer any new ethical course. Regarding the latter point, it is clear that the two principles about which poststructuralist theory revolves, if not entirely controversial, are not central to traditional ethical discourse either. Although it may be granted that representation ought to be balanced with personal freedom and that variety ought not to be constrained unnecessarily, neither of the principles has been thought to drive deep into ethical considerations pertaining to reflections on practices. This is at least in part owing to the assumption that representation and constraint of difference are not particularly egregious offenses, and thus can be overridden by more pressing social goals or more central ethical principles.

What poststructuralists have tried to show is that the effect of marginalizing these principles is more damaging than has generally been thought. If representation has had the effects poststructuralists claim it has, and if constraining difference is not merely a matter of personal expression but also one of oppressive political relationships, then the marginalization of these principles to a secondary ethical status is both an ethical and a political mistake.

And here the former point, that poststructuralism does not accept all our current ethical commitments, comes into play. A society in which resisting representation is a principle that can be overridden by the good of rehabilitation is likely to be one in which the project of normalization, with all its attendant effects, can get a sure foothold. Contrapositively, if the effects of normalization are to be resisted, then rehabilitation will have to be considered unacceptable and the principle of antirepresentation will have to be taken more seriously. If the goods brought to society by a domination of the cognitive genre are seen to be attractive enough, then promoting alternative genres will seem less urgent. Again contrapositively, if the effects of reducing all genres to the cognitive are seen as dire enough, then its current privileging ought to be resisted.

What poststructuralist anarchism has accomplished on the ethical level (in spite of its own rejection of ethical discourse) is to bring to prominence two ethical principles that, at first sight, can seem marginal and to show their necessary centrality to the core of our ethical perspective. In the process, it has called into question other ethical commitments with which it is in conflict, asking whether the effects that a commitment to these principles has brought in its wake should tempt us to reconsider the attractiveness of the principles. To engage in this ethical project is hardly to reject ethics tout *court;* rather, it is to take ethical discourse seriously enough to try to sort out some of the inconsistencies and the effects to which it has committed us. Such a project presumes a view of what ethical discourse is and is not that must itself receive address. To that task we turn presently.

It is worth noting, however, before passing from the ethical to the metaethical, that there is a consequentialist orientation to the ethical principles and operation of poststructuralist theory. This is not to say— and in fact it should be denied that—poststructuralism is a utilitarianism. Rather, it is to bear in mind that, given its orientation, neither deontological approaches nor virtue-ethical ap-

———. Nietzsche and Philosophy [1962], trans. Hugh Tomlinson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

———. Spinoza: Practical Philosophy [1970], trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books. 1988.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R Lane. New York: Viking Press, 1977.

———. Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature [1975], trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

———. Qu'est-ce que la philosophic? Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1991.

———. A Thousand Plateaus [1980], trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Claire Parnet. Dialogues [1977], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York Columbia University Press, 1987.

Derrida, Jacques. Speech and Phenomena [1967]. trans. David Allison. Evanston: Northwestern University Prss. 1973.

Descombes, Vincent. Modem French Philosophy [1979]. trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Dews, Peter. Logic: ofDisintegration: Postrstructuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory. Londom Verso, 1987.

Donzelot. Jacques. The Policing ofFamilies [1977], trans. Robert Hurley. New York Pantheon, 1979.

Dreyfus, Hubert, and Paul Rabinow. Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Ehrlich, Howa.rd, Carol Ehrlich, David DeLeon, and Glenda Morris, eds. Reineventing Anarchy. London: Routledge G' Kegan Paul, 1977.

Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish [1975], trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, 1977.

Bernstein. Edward. Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation, trans. Edith Harvey. New York Schocken Books, 1961.

Bookchin. Murray. Remaking Society. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989.

Boundas, Constantin, and Dorothea Olkowslri, eds. Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy. New York: Routledge, 1993.

Brandom, Robert. "Pragmatism, Phenornenalism, and Truth Talk." Midwest Studies in Philosophy 12 (1988): 75–93.

Brandt, Richard. A Theory of the Good and the Right. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979 .

Brink, David. Moral Realism and the Foundations ofEthics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Castel. Robert, Franooise Castel, and Anne Lovell. The Psychiatric Society, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York Columbia University Pras, 1982.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. Political and Social Writings. vols. 1 and 2, trans. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Cleaver, Harry. Reading Capital Politically. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.

Cousins, Mark, and Athar Hussain. Michel Foucault. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984.

Darwall. Stephen. Impartial Reason. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Deleuze, Gilles. Cinema 2: The Time-Image [1985], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

———. Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza [1968], trans. Martin joughin. New York Zone Books. 1990.

———. Foucault [1986], trans. Sean Hand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1988.

———. The Logic of Sense [1969], trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York Columbia University Press. I990.

proaches would be appropriate to it. The former go against the micropolitical grain of poststructuralism; if reflection must be tied to concrete situations, then the attempt to construct a set of duties that answer solely to practical reasoning would be futile. Alternatively, an approach to ethics that relies on the evaluation of character, rather than upon practices, runs afoul of poststructuralism's antihumanism. For poststructuralism, the evaluation of character must be based on the practices a person engages in, not vice versa.

None of this is to claim that poststructuralism is a utilitarianism, however. Consequentialist thought need not be reducible to any single category of consequence on pain of losing its commitment to evaluating actions in terms of their results. A disjunction of consequences can be considered a feasible candidate for ethical analysis if one is willing, as poststructuralists surely are, to trade in ease of evaluation for ethical scope. Although a full-fledged defense of a poststructuralist consequentialism would require a separate book, one fruitful preliminary suggestion (not directed toward poststructuralism) has been forthcoming from the philosopher of science Richard Boyd. He suggests that the good be defined not in terms of a single quality or characteristic (as traditional utilitarians used to with the quality of "happiness" or "pleasure") but, instead, as a "homeostatic cluster." The idea here is that, just as biological species are categorized not by a single characteristic they possess but instead by a cluster of characteristics in some homeostatic relationship to one another (one or two of which may be missing in a single member of the species without affecting its membership), so the good should be defined in terms of a set of (often) mutually reinforcing consequences. The concept of a homeostatic cluster allows for the possibility of delineating a nonreductive consequentialism that might be able to capture the richness of poststructuralist political theory.[39]

_____

[39] Boyd offers this ethical approach with "How to Be a Moral Realist," in *Essays on* Moral Realism, ed. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Ithaca: Cornell University

If the foregoing account is correct, we have established two claims: 1) that poststructuralist anarchism does indeed possess ethical commitments undergirding its political analyses; and 2) that those commitments are not foreign to contemporary ethical discourse (although, if accepted with the seriousness that post-structuralists propose, they would introduce significant changes into our current ethical practice). As yet, though, the deeper question remains unanswered. Does poststructuralist political theory allow for the possibility of ethical judgment at all? The Critical Theorists' answer is in the negative, in good part because they see the necessity for ethical commitments beneath all practice rather than within the network of practices. What must be accomplished, then, if poststructuralism is to be redeemed as a political theory, is the construction of a view of ethics as a practice, with its own power relationships, and yet one that allows for the possibility of judging other practices. The metaethical considerations that follow provide a ground for those practices called "ethics" by Foucault (practices of the self) and Deleuze (the affirmation of life), yet avoid the problem of the domination of one monolithic practice that concerns Lyotard in his attempt to offer an ethics.

If ethics is a practice, it is one of the stems on the rhizome pictured by Deleuze and Guattari. It intersects other practices, and in many fashions. Some it intersects by judging, others by a resonance that stems from the use of similar concepts, others by be-

_____

Press, 1988), pp. 181–228. It should be noted that the poststructuralists would probably balk at Boyd's moral realism; such realist commitments, however, are unnecessary to the concept of a homeostatic cluster. One issue that the ethical approach elucidated here would have to come to terms with is that of punishment. Since the right to punish is usually predicated on someone's ability to choose otherwise than he or she did, and since that ability—that freedom—is usually sought in a subjective human essence, poststructuralism would have to offer an account of how punishment could be justified in the absence of any traditional notion of freedom. Although a full discussion of this issue would take matters too far afield, I suspect that the justification of punishment would be based on considerations of what practices were reasonably available to someone at the time he or she acted.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor. Negative Dialectic: [1966], tram. E. B. Ashton. New York: Seabury Press, 1973.

Althusser, Louis. For Marx [1965], trans. Ben Brewster. London: Verso, 1979.

———. Lenin and Philosophy. trans. Ben Brewster. New York Monthly Review Press. 1971.

———. Reading Capital [1968]. trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books. 1970.

Apel, Karl-Otto. Towards a Transformation of Philosophy [1972–73]. trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,1980.

Aristotle. The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon. NewYork: Random House, 1941.

Arrington, Robert. Rationalism. Realism. and Relativism: Perspectives in Contempotary Moral Epistemology. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Bakunin, Mikhail. God and the State. New York: Dover. 1970.

———. Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings, ed. Arthur Lenning; trans. Steven Cox and Olive Stevens. London: Jonathan Cape. 1973.

Benhabib, Seyla, and Fred Dallmyer. eds. The Communicative Ethics Controversy: MIT Press. 1990.

Bennington, Geoffrey. Lyotard: Writing the Event. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Bernauer, James, and David Rasmussen. The Final Foucault. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988.

What has been attempted here is the articulation of an approach to ethics that is both consonant with poststructuralist anarchism and able to support the ethical claims poststructuralism relies upon. To conceive ethics as a practice is not to vitiate one's ethical commitments but, rather, to recognize in them their situated character. Should this conception of ethics finally prove defensible, then the politics that appeals to it, as well as the specific ethical claims upon which that politics rests, will themselves seem more plausible. In any case, the larger project engaged in here, that of constructing a political viewpoint that is neither foundationalist nor nihilist, neither totalitarian nor libertarian, attempts to capture what is—or at least what ought to be—most lasting in the legacy of poststructuralist political thought: its anarchism.

ing incorporated into them, and still others by virtue of substituting itself for them (as, for instance, the introduction of a practice of ethics would replace a community's commitment to social Darwinism). This entails that any view of ethics that converges with poststructuralist political theory must allow for the possibility of ethical changes and development that come not only from the force of reason, but also from changes in other practices in the social network. It also entails that ethics must be seen as a collage, a *bricolage,* with precepts and principles that do not necessarily (and in fact do not) form a seamless whole. That ethical practice can be internally inconsistent does not, of course, imply that it ought to be. What it does imply, however, is that it is always possible to play one ethical principle or ethical argument off against another in a way that changes ethical practice.

The part of ethical practice we are most, though not exclusively, concerned with here is ethical judgment: the judgment of the acceptability or unacceptability of other practices. This does not preclude us from considering ethics as an action-guiding practice, however. Rather, one of the central aspects of ethical judgment is its support for or criticism of actions associated with practices, both in the case of oneself and in the case of others. Thus, we shall focus on ethics as a discursive practice, a practice of judging practices and the actions those practices comprise. This discussion may not capture all that there is to be said about ethics in its nondiscursive components, but it will show how a poststructuralist discursive practice of ethical judgment is compatible with the commitments of its political theory. To do this, I will borrow from the work of several recent Anglo-American philosophers, especially David Wiggins, John McDowell, and Robert Arrington.[40]

_____

[40] One can imagine these thinkers balking at the use to which their reflections are put here—especially John McDowell, since he attempts to articulate a character-centered rather than practice-centered metaethical position. While I hope to capture important aspects of the positions of these thinkers, and while

Ethical discursive practice—ethical discourse—has three central components: factual claims, practical judgments, and claims of value. Factual claims are the claims traditionally associated with descriptions. Foucault's histories, Deleuze's and the early Lyotard's metaphysics, and the later Lyotard's sketches of different genres are all factual accounts. As such, factual claims, claims made in what Lyotard calls the "cognitive genre," are necessary elements in any ethical discourse. It would make no sense, for instance, to apply an ethical judgment to a practice if in fact that practice did not have the effects upon which the judgment was based.

The distinction between practical judgments and values, a distinction that is too often overlooked in treatments of ethical discourse, concerns one difference between saying what is and saying what one ought to do. To make a claim of value—that some practice, for instance, is good or acceptable—is not to claim that one ought to engage in it, although it gives some reason for its promotion. That further claim is a practical judgment, a judgment of what ought to be done. (We have so far called these practical judgments "principles." For example, we referred to the two practical judgments promoted by poststructuralist political theory as such. As a matter of convenience, we occasionally use that term below.) Values and practical judgments alike are types of ethical judgment; however, the former resemble descriptions in a way that the latter do not. Thus, values can be seen as a bridge between factual claims and practical judgments. As David Wiggins, who has emphasized this distinction, notes: "If we then conceive of a distinction between *is* and *must* as corresponding to the distinction between appreciation and decision and at the same time emancipate ourselves from a limited and absurd idea of what is, then there can

_____

I attempt to construct a sketch of a metaethics that incorporates them, I do not want to leave the impression that one can move from the positions of any of these men directly to the metaethical position offered here.

Arrington's point is an important one, although it is slightly miscast. He has recognized the Wittgensteinian point that if ethical discourse is a linguistic practice of giving reasons for action, then there is eventually a bedrock beneath which one can offer no more reasons, and to ask for any reasons beyond them is to misunderstand the linguistic practice in which one is engaged. (It might be an error, for instance, to ask for a principle of universalizability as a concept that supports all the others in the practice.) As Wittgenstein argues: "Nothing we do can be defended absolutely and finally. But only by reference to something else that is not questioned. I.e. no reason can be given why you should act (or should have acted) like this, except that by doing so you bring about such and such a situation, which again has to be an aim you accept."[60] At some point, the giving of reasons runs out; in order to engage in ethical discourse, there must be something within the ethical discursive practice that the discussants share. It does not follow, however, that it can be said in advance *what it is* that those discussants must share. Whether there are indeed isolable basic ethical claims that one cannot question without exiting our ethical discourse seems questionable; as noted above, ethical discourse is more holistic than that. This is not to say that in the context of a given discussion there cannot be a basic claim or group of claims that discussants must share in order to engage in recognizably ethical discourse, but rather to insist upon a skepticism that outside of those contexts there is a list of ethical claims that could be called "basic." It is a point to which poststructuralists have, in their theoretical practice, called our attention.

The outline of ethical practice we offer here is in many ways partial. It assumes without defense certain of its key features: for example, a deflationist approach to truth. To engage in a full defense of poststructuralist ethics will have to await another book.

_____

[60] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value,* ed. G. H. von Wright; trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 16.

what counts as an ethical claim at all, can be decided only by the lights of our own ethical discourse: "Morality has to do with personal autonomy and integrity, respect for persons, avoidance of harm to persons, and similar notions. If a person or a society uses the word 'morality' to refer to matters distinct from these, we are not willing to grant that they are talking about *morality,* what *we* mean by 'morality.'"[57] Furthermore, ethics is not defined independently of the kinds of practices we consider to be exemplary of ethical practice, discursive and nondiscursive. In a Wittgensteinian move, Arrington claims that certain ethical claims act as "grammatical rules" for the constitution of ethics and not merely as substantive ethical claims:

> "One ought to keep one's promises" and "It is wrong to tell a lie" simultaneously serve to define, on the one hand, 'keeping one's promises' and 'lying' and, on the other hand, the moral notions of obligation and wrongdoing… One does not understand mo ralitv by grasping a general definition of it; one understands it by knowing that we are morally obligated to tell the truth and keep our promises, as well as to avoid harming others to respect them.[58]

About these grammatical rules, then, "it makes no sense to say that we *believe* them, for if we did so we might incorrectly believe them… [A]nyone who rejects them simply does not understand what morality is or simply rejects morality."[59]

---

[57] Arrington, *Rationalism, Realism, and* Relativism: Perspectives *in Contemporary* Moral *Epistemology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 252. Although Arrington uses terms such as "autonomy" and "integrity," he should not be read as endorsing the kind of traditional subjectivity criticized by the poststructuralists. As a Wittgensteinian, Arrington is more concerned with social practices than with personal constitution. The claim he makes, then, should be read in a metaphysically weak fashion.

[58] Ibid, p. 283.

[59] Ibid, p. 275.

be a new verisimilitude in our several accounts of these things."[41] The picture of ethical discourse we want to develop here is one that takes it as a practice of making, endorsing, and discussing claims that involve values and practical judgments, the commitment to which is, or at least ought to be, given by the weight of the best reasons on behalf of those values or practical judgments. This picture is not one, however, that follows the quasi-transcendental path of Habermas and Apel, and in the course of my discussion I will offer reasons to think that such a path ought not be followed.

What needs to be recognized at the outset is that claims to ethical truth can be seen as no more problematic than factual claims to truth, claims made in the cognitive genre. Throughout the first half of this century, it was commonly held in Anglo-American philosophy that there was nothing in the world for ethical claims to be true of and, thus, that ethical claims were devoid of truth-value. Recent accounts of ethics have disputed the assumption that there is nothing in the world that responds to these claims.[42] Such a path of dispute, however, involving the metaphysical commitment to realism, would be less attractive to poststructuralists than another alternative: denying that there is any metaphysical loading in the concept of truth. Various deflationary accounts of truth have done just that, and they are confluent with the poststructuralist project.

Although a full account—much more a defense—of deflationary theories of truth cannot be offered here, what is central to them is the denial that by calling a claim "true" one is adding any more content to the claim than was already there.[43] As one approach

---

[41] Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," in Essex . on Moral *Realism,* ed. Sayre-McCord, p. 134.

[42] These are the moral realists. For an extended discussion of moral realism, see David Brink's Moral Realism *and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) as well as Boyd, "How to Be a Moral Realist," and Peter Railton, "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review,* no. 95 (1986): 163–207.

[43] Although deflationary theories of truth abound, a particularly attractive one is offered by Dorothy Grover, Joseph Camp, Jr., andNuel Belnap.Jr. in their article "The Prosentential Theory of Truth," Philosophical Studies 27 (1975): 73–125.

has said, "'true' is far from redundant, but its role in English is logical rather than ascriptive."[44] To say that a claim is true, on deflationary accounts, is more or less to refer to the claim, often in an endorsing way. It is not to ascribe any new property to the claim, as is commonly held to be the case by correspondence theories of truth. Thus, regarding the question of truth, there is neither more nor less to be said on behalf of the truth of ethical claims than there is on behalf of what are traditionally considered factual ones.

Given this account of truth, the status of moral claims—both value claims and practical judgments—becomes clear. When one says "Psychological practice is oppressive," this is true if and only if psychological practice is oppressive. Similarly, regarding practical judgments, if one says "People ought not, as far as possible, to engage in practices of representation," that is true if and only if people ought not, as far as possible, to engage in practices of representation. To posit the truth of a moral claim is to do no more—but no less—than to posit that claim itself. At the level of recognizing which claims admit of the possibility of truth, there is nothing to distinguish values from practical judgments.

The reasons to believe in moral values in the same way, and to the same extent, that one believes in objects that more naturally gain our assent, then, do not have to do with any likeness, such as explanatory efficacy or potential accessibility to the senses, normally ascribed to descriptive discourse. John McDowell has said regarding moral "world views" that "to query their status as world views on the ground of not being scientific is to be motivated not

of which would be a con tradiction, but in a more empirical sense, one is faced by the problem that an action one might want to see generalized might not be one others want to see generalized; and ethical practice involves, if anything, at least partially a taking account of others' viewpoints. Moreover, if one then moves to address this problem by removing oneself from one's specific desires, it becomes unclear what the basis is for judging an action to be desirable if generalized.[55] Rather than consider univerealization as a method for deciding which principles are ethical, we must instead test and adjust already recognizable ethical principles by means of their universalizability: "Universalization is no longer a method or any part of the method for the initial generation of moral ideas and principles. It works on what is already fully moralized and in no way merely *prima facie.* At best, it is a method of reminder and adjustment *already* implicit in what it is deployed upon… [T]he universalizer … is bidden onto the scene not in the role of an explorer or first map-maker but in the role of a surveyor visiting a scene already discovered and directly known."[56] This should not be surprising to us, given the above discussion. Since ethical discourse is a practice within the rhizomatic network of practices, to expect universalizability to be determinative for what should count as ethical claims would be to neglect the embeddedness of ethical practice in the larger web of social life. What is required is a recognition of the ineliminable but also not exhaustive place for universalizability in ethical discourse and practice.

Moreover, if what are often considered to be claims that are external to ethical discourse—"modesty operators," for instance—are in fact internal to it, then ethical discourse runs deeper than many previous moral theorists have thought. Robert Arrington has suggested that not only what counts as a correct ethical claim, but

---

They argue that the phrases "That's true" and "It's true" are anaphoric devices designed to refer to sentences or groups of sentences previously uttered. In other words, those phrases operate primarily as a device for substitutional quantification. A similar line of thought, which tries to separate the "that" or "it" from the "true," is pursued by Robert Brandom in his article "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," Midwest Studies in Philosophy 12 (1988): 75–93.
[44] Grover, Camp, and Belnap, The Prosentential Theory of Truth." p. 123.

[55] Wiggins, "Universalizability, Impartiality, Truth," in *Needs, Values. Truth* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1987). esp. pp. 68–78.
[56] Ibid., pp. 78–79.

outlooks which it is part of the task of ethical discourse to balance had been reduced to a pale conformity.

That is why, at the metaethical level, the two principles articulated above as the fundamental ethical commitments of poststructuralist ethics require *ceteris paribus* caveats. There is no question of a partial commitment to an ethical principle; rather, there is a commitment to an ethical principle that is perhaps (depending on the consequences of the commitment) limited in its scope. The limitation would occur when the effects of the commitment conflict with another ethical commitment more deeply held. It was perhaps the failure to recognize this point that moved poststructuralists from embracing an ethical principle promoting difference to rejecting ethical discourse outright. If ethical claims must be applied modestly, then there is no such thing as ethical discourse, and the attempt to construct such a discourse out of nonmodest principles is likely to be a form of political coercion. That ought to be rejected. If, however, principles include modesty in their content, then there is no reason to reject them as such.

But we are faced with another difficulty, one that requires us to deepen the account a bit further before we can say that we have given a description of uniquely ethical practice. As David Wiggins points out, universal izabil it y cannot generate ethical claims but can only test them once generated. A claim has already to be agreed to be ethical before one can see whether it is acceptable— by means of generalizing it. The problem with generalization as a generative principle of ethical action, he points out, is that all the candidates for that which is to be generalized are unacceptable: they do not assuredly generate ethically acceptable, or even ethical, claims.

The problems with straightforward Kantian universalizability are well known. It may, for instance, be right to forgive a debtor his or her debt, but this is not necessarily a generalizable principle, and its denial is certainly not a contradiction. If, alternatively, one speaks of universalizing not in a transcendental sense, the denial

by science but by scientism."[45] This reasoning is of a piece with Lyotard's critique of traditional approaches to science. In his discussion of the relation of scientific knowledge to narrative knowledge, Lyotard states that while narrative knowledge's "incomprehension of the problems of scientific discourse is accompanied by a certain tolerance ... [t]he opposite is not true. The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped ..."[46]

Scientism derives not merely from a blind devotion to science, but from a commitment to a genre of discourse that makes scientism all but inevitable. When the cognitive is conceived as the model of linguistic practice, and when that genre is seen as reflective of or corresponding to a reality, then it is not surprising that the status of ethical discourse (since it is not primarily descriptive) becomes questionable and that science (though in a distorted fashion) becomes the model for discourse. Lyotard himself goes astray on precisely this point. In his treatment of ethical discourse, although he affirms that it is as legitimate as—if different from— cognitive discourse, he assimilates all giving of reasons, and thus all claims to truth, to cognitive discourse. By doing so, he precludes the possibility of ethics being a practice, one that can be shared among people rather than engaged in solely by oneself:

> The obligated one is caught in a dilemma: either he or she names the addressor of the law and exposes the authority and sense of the law, and then he or she ceases to be obligated solely by the mere fact that the law, thus rendered intelligible to cognition, becomes an object of discussion and loses its obligatory value. Or

---

[45] McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* supp. (1978); 19.

[46] Lyotard, The *Postmodern* Condition, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 27.

else, he or she recognizes that this value cannot be exposited, that he or she cannot phrase in the place of the law, and then this tribunal cannot admit that the law obligates him or her since the law is without reason and therefore arbitrary.[47]

What is it, then, that gives us reasons to believe in values and practical judgments? Reasons themselves. What is emerging as we proceed is a view of linguistic practice generally (of which ethical discourse is a species) in which what count as adequate motivation for the belief in the truth of a claim are the reasons that can be brought forth and defended against all comers in favor of that claim. Such reasons cannot be offered as compelling to one who refuses the game in its entirety, simply because nothing will count as a reason for that person. Ethics, in short, cannot be defended from the outside; it is holistic in that sense. The attempt to believe that it needs such a defense is precisely the earmark of scientism. As McDowell has put the point: "No particular verdict or judgment would be a sacrosanct starting-point, supposedly immune to critical scrutiny, in our earning the right to claim that some such verdicts or judgments stand a chance of being true. That is not at all to say that we must earn that right from an initial position in which *all* such verdicts or judgments are suspended at once, as in the projectivist picture of a range of responses to a world that does not contain values."[48]

Ethical discourse, then, is holistic in two senses: it cannot be founded on another discourse (although, as an open whole, it is in constant interaction with other discourses), and it has no foundations within itself. One cannot reduce ethical discourse to the cognitive (or to any other discourse), and there are no values or principles that cannot come up for question on the basis of others.

---

[47] Lyotard, *The Differend,* p. 117
[48] McDowell, "Projection and Truth in Ethics," The *Lindley Lecture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1987), p. 10.

would have to allow that contradicttory ethical claims could both be true, the reason for finding such a position unpersuasive is that it banks upon the very discourse it is trying to reject. A certain kind of cultural relativism—a better word here would be "modesty"—concerning our own ethical judgments is compelling because a strong case can be made out for it by the lights of our practice. That modesty would have its roots in a respect for difference, a historical view of what happens to other cultures when we try to assimilate them, and a recognition that our culture has hardly perfected an art of living—a shortcoming that might be traceable in part to our ethical point of view. Thus, the truth of cultural relativism is not a truth external to our ethical discourse, but one that lies closer to home.

This discussion might lead one to question the universality of ethical claims. If modesty is to be one of our principles, then does that subvert the claim of these principles to be universal? No. We must not think of our discourse as having ethical claims to which we might apply a "modesty operator" in order to tone them down from universality to something less. Rather, the problem is to find the right articulation of our principles in the first place. What makes ethical judgment and the formation of an ethical position dicey is not the status of ethical claims, but their content. Ethical judgments about what responsibility exists in a given situation or about what to do under certain circumstances are often hard to construct. This difficulty might lead one to believe that ethical claims are situation-specific. But this would be an illusion. The difficulty attaching to ethical discourse derives from the difficulty, given the possibility both of competing values and principles and competing descriptions of the circumstances one finds oneself in, of articulating a correct ethical position. Were ethics to be situation-specific, there would be no such thing as ethics, because there would be no generalization. Alternatively, were ethics to be an easy affair, that would be because the different interests, worldviews, passions, and

on a rejection of the bindingness of ethical claims upon those who don't have a reason to accept them: "Our moral principles are binding only on those who share them or whose principles give them reasons to accept them."[54] How, Harman asks, could one hold another ethically responsible for an action that she had no reason not to commit or for an omission she had no reason to rectify? Harman agrees with our account as far as finding an action or a person good or evil solely from within one's own ethical discourse, but diverges at the point of holding one who does not share one's ethical discourse *responsible* by the lights of that discourse, precisely because that person has no reason for taking such responsibility.

Harman's general principle is right here, but he misconceives the explanation for it. One wants to ask, Why does not having a reason for an action absent one from ethical responsibility for it? The answer, roughly cast, is that the person in question did not know that the action was ethically blameworthy or praiseworthy. (This allows Harman to separate judgments of good or evil from judgments of responsibility.) But such a principle is an ethical one, and one that resides precisely in our own ethical discursive practice. Harman's principle of withholding judgment is compelling to us not because of its relation to the person in question, but because of its relation to those of us who operate by the lights of a discourse we share with Harman. As such, it is bound to the justifications and to the qualifications that might attach to it in balancing it with other ethical claims.

An objection can arise here from another quarter, however. Suppose someone were to claim that Harman is right about ethical responsibility, but wrong about judgments of good and evil. That would be a more fullblown relativism, one that would recommend withholding all ethical judgment on those who do not share our discourse. Aside from traditional objections that such a claim

The latter consideration does not entail that all ethical values are equal. Rather, it entails that no values are immune from scrutiny. What that scrutiny will turn up can only be discovered when certain values or principles are played off against others. It is this playing off of some values or principles against others that, as discussed above, constitutes the fundamental ethical contribution of poststructuralist anarchism. Here it can be seen how a holistic—or nonfoundationalist—view of ethics admits that possibility.

What Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard achieve in their political writings is a reopening of the question of ethical values and practical judgments associated with humanism. They point out the costs of the commitments to such values and judgments. And they suggest (implicitly) that more weight be given to alternative ethical claims that have previously occupied only a marginal place in ethical discourse. The surprising conclusion in all this is that to place more weight on these previously neglected values would be more in keeping with our general ethical viewpoint than to continue privileging the humanist values often thought central to it.

This conclusion is similar to the one advocated by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and* Socialist Strategy, except that their view of ethics is less holistic than the view elucidated here. They argue that political discourse and action must not reject, but instead should be predicated on, Enlightenment values: "*The task of the Left therefore cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy*"[49] Although Laclau and Mouffe offer compelling reasons to reject a foundational analysis of political space—in contrast to the Marxist legacy they seek to replace—they allow themselves to accept on the ethical register what they reject on the political one. If the analysis offered here is right, how ever, then the ethical issue is not that of accepting or rejecting liberaldemo-

---

[54] Harman, The Nature of Morality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 90.

[49] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985), p. 176.

cratic values as a whole, but of asking which of those values we ought to embrace at the expense of which others.

We cannot abandon the Enlightenment legacy *tout court*, because to do so is to abdicate the responsibility to justify one's political choice, since all ethical discourse is bound to values the Enlightenment has bequeathed us. But to accept the Enlightenment as a whole without question is to neglect the rhizomatic character of any genre of discourse. Genres of discourse, like other practices, do not arise in isolation from society. They interact with, and at points take on, aspects of other practices. It is unlikely that any discursive practice is a seamless whole, and ethics surely is not. Therefore, the ethical project of any political theory is not just to accept, or even to "deepen," our ethical legacy; it is to scrutinize it critically, but always from within parameters defined not by specific commitments but by the whole those commitments comprise.

It is this point that discourse ethics, too, fails to grasp. By seeking ethical commitments that lie beneath all discourse, rather than within discursive practice, discourse ethics would like to remove itself from the contingency and impurity of practice that seems to subvert the possibility of *any* ethical commitment. We have tried to show that contingency and impurity do not form bars to ethical commitment. The refusal to accept the Enlightenment, or modernism, as a whole does not constitute a rejection of it as a whole, either ethically or epistemically. As Foucault puts the point, "I think that the blackmail which has very often been at work in every critique of reason or every critical inquiry into the history of rationality (either you accept rationality or you fall prey to the irrational) operates as though a rational critique of rationality were impossible."[50]

_____

[50] Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," in Politics, Philosophy, Culture, p. 27

factual claim—for example, "It is stormy weather when circumstances C obtain"—which, when combined with the latter claim of the first pair, is not action-guiding. Here, by the way, one can see a way to the resolution of the debate about whether an "ought" can be derived from an "is." In essence, our claim is that a guide for action cannot be derived entirely from an "is"; but neither can it be derived from an "ought." It is, in fact, the interaction of the two in ethical discourse that provides the grounds for action. We must note that, although in some sense ethical claims are distinct from factual ones, in ethical discourse taken as a practice, ethical claims and factual ones are both necessary. For ethical discursive practice to exist, there must be in its specific structure practical judgments, value-claims and factual claims, linked by networks of reasons both to one another and to other practices.

This cannot be all there is to the account, however. As yet, we have not sufficiently distinguished ethical claims from, say, claims of etiquette. Ethical claims also possess a universal character. Claims that one ought to perform action X in circumstances C, or that killing is wrong, or that it is ethically praiseworthy to help those who are oppressed by one's own government are not made relative to a cultural context. This follows from the semantics of ethical claims; if the claim "One ought to perform action X under circumstances C" is true, then one ought to perform X in C. The best reasons one has for believing that such a claim is true are precisely those reasons which can be given in ethical discourse. Thus, universality is a characteristic of ethical discourse, but not because we are compelled to universalize our claims for nonethical reasons. It is precisely because ethical claims mean what they seem to mean that they are universal; and if they are true, they are binding upon everyone. One misconceives ethical discourse by ignoring its status as a linguistic practice that forms part of *our own* rhizomatic network.

An objection might be raised here along the lines of the ethicist Gilbert Harman, whose ethical relativism is founded precisely

is correct that the question of what description a set of circumstances falls under is central to the question of ethical action; however, ethical differences are not easily reducible to such differences. It is still ethically possible for someone to agree, for instance, on all descriptions of what constitutes a human being, on the differences between human beings and property, and still hold that slavery is ethically permissible (perhaps by divorcing slavery from ownership of property). A claim to that effect is one we might find ethically abominable; but we could hardly deny it its status as an ethical claim.

We should note that in this distinction between circumstances and principles or practical judgments, values tend to fall on the side of circumstances. We may argue, for instance, over whether a contemplated action should be considered an act of courage or merely bravado. It is not difficult to see, however, that a decision regarding which value the situation embodies is not entirely divorced from the question of how one ought to act in it. This seems to be the source of McDowell's claim that virtuous persons see situations differently from nonvirtuous persons.

In any case, once the reasons have been offered (and, presumably, agreed upon), the ethical claim becomes action-guiding. The claim "One ought to perform action X under circumstances C" along with the claim "Circumstances C obtain" together provide the motivation for a lam guage departure: the performing (all other things being equal) of action A. The peculiarly action-guiding character of the ethical claim can be seen in contrast to a purely

---

possessor of the virtue of kindness must know that it is so." We should remark here that in this latter article, McDowell argues against the kind of syllogistic reasoning that I propose here as a model of moral discourse. As an account of the kinds of implicit moral learning that we in fact do, his account seems right; however, in regard to explicit moral discourse, the kind of reasoning I describe here seems to provide a more accurate picture. Whether one believes that moral learning should remain implicit or become explicit and selfcritical may hinge on how one evaluates our current moral situation.

Moreover, if ethical discourse does not form a seamless web, the very project of seeking a value or principle beneath all discourse, and thus immune from all critique, is doomed to failure. Habermas and Apel argue that one cannot engage in a project of communicative activity without engaging in the realization of certain ethical principles. That is not entirely false (although it cuts a wide swath in a field more variegated than they would like to admit).[51] However, the strength of their claim lies in their isolating principles that are defining for certain types of inquiry, for a certain type of discursive practice. To violate those pruv ciples is to be not engaged in that practice. This is not because one has somehow betrayed a commitment that one can be held to simply by speaking, but because one is not engaging in the practice defined by those principles. Thus, the performative self-contradiction committed by someone who appears to be engaged in rational inquiry but who is not acting in accord with the principles of such inquiry indicates that this person either did not understand the practice or was not really engaged in it. Either of those possibilities, especially the latter, is an ethical problem only if the practice itself is ethically justified. That justification, however, can come only from reasons that attach themselves to an ethical discursive practice. Discourse ethics, in short, mistakes the status of its claims.

What discourse ethics reveals—and this is not a little—is that the commitment to certain principles brings along with it a commitment to others. Specifically, the political point is that if one is excluding people from certain communicative practices, then one is not seriously pursuing the goals one claims to be seeking by participating in those practices. None of that is in conflict with poststructuralist political theory. What would be in conflict with it is if any

---

[51] It might not be out of place, for instance, for discussants engaged in psychoanalytic discourse to make strategic moves that reveal hidden conflicts in other discussants as a way of moving discussion forward. This would seem to run afoul of the strictures on communicative action proposed by Apel and Habermas.

or all of those values were absolute, unable to come up for scrutiny in terms of an ethical discursive practice that was contingent and infused with relations of power.

To return to the thread of the argument, it may look as though ethical discourse were indistinguishable from descriptive discourse, not because it is reducible to it but, instead, because both are linguistic practices that fall under the same account. If this were the case, we would violate Lyotard's specific stricture against the reduction of genres and, more generally, the antireductionist bent of poststructuralist anarchism. It is time, then, to begin distinguishing moral discourse from other types of discourse, both in order to isolate its central characteristics and to show how what are traditionally considered to be its distinctive traits—action-guidingness and universality—appear in our account.

The philosopher Wilfrid Sellars has discussed the relationships between certain linguistic practices and other linguistic and nonlinguistic practices in an essay entitled "Some Reflections on Language Games." He distinguishes two types: language-entry and language-departure transitions. Language-entry transitions are "those learned transitions … in which one comes to occupy a position in the game … but the *terminus a quo* of the transition is not [a position in the game]." Language-departure transitions are "these learned transitions … in which from occupying a position in the game … we come to behave in a way which is not a position in the game."[52] If we think of ethical discourse as a practice, language entries are moves into the practice; language departures are moves out of it into another discourse or practice.

Ethical discourse is often, but not solely, concerned with language departure transitions. In an ethical claim, for example, of the form "One ought to perform action X under circumstances C," one is stating that if it is the case that circumstances C obtain, then one ought to perform action X. Now the giving of reasons can appear at two, often intertwined, junctures with regard to such a claim: 1) in the question of whether one indeed ought to perform that action under those circumstances; and 2) in a given context, whether those circumstances in fact obtain. The chiasm between these two junctures can be seen in the fact that ethical disagreement can—and often does—occur in situations where agreement that "circumstances C obtain" might invite rethinking as to whether the ethical principle was indeed the right one. Here one has the alternatives of denying that the circumstances are of type C or revising the original principle. One can imagine, for instance, that if it were somehow to be discovered that a fetus could survive outside the womb if connected to advanced and expensive medical equipment two weeks after conception, this could force upon someone who had been pro-choice until the moment of survivability a decision about whether to redefine "survivability" or to abandon a pro-choice position almost entirely.

The significance of these two sources of reasons should not be underestimated. In an argument that can be traced back to Hume, some theorists (clearly not poststructuralists) hold that human sentiments are universal; disagreement occurs only regarding the facts of the case. It is, for instance, possible to hold that a disagreement over the ethical permissibility of slavery is not a conflict of ethical sentiments but, rather, hinges on the factual question of, for example, what constitutes a human being and what is amenable to property relationships. This position finds a contemporary echo in John McDowell's claim that people of virtue see situations that call for ethical action differently from those who are less virtuous.[53] It

_____

[52] Sellars, "Some Reflections on Language Games" (1954), in *Science, Perception, and* Reality (London: Routledge tf Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 329.

_____

[53] See, for instance, McDowell's "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" pp. 20–21, and "Virtue and Reason," The Monist 62 (1979): 333: "Possession of the virtue must involve not only sensitivity to facts about others' feelings as reasons for acting in certain ways, but also sensitivity to facts about rights as reasons for acting in certain ways; and when circumstances of both sorts obtain, and a circumstance of the second sort is the one that should be acted on, a