13

Michel Foucault, Historian and Social Theorist (1926–84)

Life (1926–84)

It was a fateful coincidence that Paul-Michel Foucault shared with Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) the same date of birth – October 15 – for Foucault reincarnated many of Nietzsche's ideas in the twentieth-century French style. Although Nietzsche's modest upbringing contrasted with Foucault's privileged family circumstances, both children grew up under the matter-of-fact assumption that they would continue the family heritage: Nietzsche's father and grandfather were Lutheran ministers, and during his childhood, Nietzsche was called 'the little pastor;' Foucault's father and grandfather were surgeons, and Foucault was accordingly steered toward the medical profession. Both fulfilled their families' expectations in oblique ways: after some early years in the comforting bosom of Christianity, Nietzsche became a hard-line anti-Christian; after working within the context of health-related organizations as a young man, Foucault became a trenchant critic of the medical, especially psychiatric, institutions, and a critic of rigid institutional structures in general. In their own times and in their own ways, both men transformed into intellectual rebels and revolutionaries.

At age twenty, Foucault entered the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. Such prestige carried with it a pressure to 'shine' and to be 'brilliant,' and Foucault worked diligently within this elite academic environment, suffering sometimes from serious bouts of depression. There were rumors of a suicide

attempt when he was twenty-two, and these support the reflection that a driving and unsettling tension marked Foucault's personality – one that was probably complicated by his homosexuality. As a promising scholar in the late 1940s, Foucault's sexual inclinations stood in a collision path with the relatively conservative and restrictive French academic world of which he was a part, and within which he desired to excel.

Foucault joined the French Communist Party at age twenty-four, and although this membership was short-lived, a Marxist spirit endured within Foucault's later writings: just as Karl Marx campaigned forcefully against institutional powers that exploited the less economically privileged population, Foucault never lost his sympathy for the disadvantaged and marginalized members of society, directing many of his books and articles to the exposure of the mechanisms responsible for social oppression. It was Foucault's destiny to become the champion of the outsider.

By the time he had reached his late twenties, Foucault had completed a course in psychopathology, had attended clinical training sessions and lectures on psychoanalytic theory, and had become part of the Philosophy faculty at the University of Lille, where he taught philosophy and psychology. Foucault's knowledge of mental illness was enhanced by his work experiences at the Sainte-Anne mental hospital and the Centre National d'Orientation at Fresnes – a prison that housed the French penal system's chief medical facilities. At the Sainte-Anne mental hospital, Foucault drew up psychological–neurological profiles of the patients, administered specialized psychological tests and attended lectures on psychoanalysis given by Jacques Lacan, who was a member of the medical staff.

During the first half of the 1960s, Foucault was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Clermont-Ferrand. Then for two years (1966–68), he lived abroad in Tunisia as a visiting professor at the University of Tunis – a position that kept him away from Paris during the turbulent and revolutionary May of 1968. Upon his return to France later in 1968, Foucault headed the Philosophy Department at the new University of Vincennes, and in 1969 he entered into the commanding echelon of French academic life with an election to the Collège de France. With this election, and choosing the title, 'Professor in the History of Systems of Thought,' Foucault joined the elite circle of Collège academics, which included Henri Bergson, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Roland Barthes.

The 1960s were productive years for Foucault, and they issued in some of his best-known and most influential writings. Soon after *Madness and Civilization*, which traced the birth of the mental asylum, Foucault published *Naissance de la clinique – Une archéologie du régard médical* (*The Birth of the Clinic – An Archeology of Medical Perception* [1963]), which documented the rise of the

mathematical, quantitative approach to medical problems and to human bodily functioning in general. 1966 was perhaps one of Foucault's best publication years, since *Les mots and les choses – Une archéologie des sciences humaines* [*The Order of Things – An Archeology of the Human Sciences*] – a book which examined the foundations of knowledge during the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Modern periods – became a bestseller. To cap the decade, Foucault published *L'archéologie du savoir [The Archeology of Knowledge]* in 1969, bringing into explicit thematization, the method of inquiry he had been adopting up until this point.

Foucault devoted the last fourteen years of his life to teaching and writing, frequently punctuating his daily affairs with leftist political activism, public lectures and mass media appearances. Among the latter is his November 1971 debate with the American linguist–philosopher, Noam Chomsky (1928–), shown on Dutch television. Chomsky had already established a reputation as a hard-fisted critic of the United States's military involvement in Vietnam and as a voice of social conscience, but his rationality-respecting approach to political strategy stood in domesticated contrast to Foucault's more forcefully iconoclastic and confrontational stance. A few years later, in 1975, as an intellectual and historical comment on contemporary prison conditions, Foucault wrote *Surveiller et punir – Naissance de la prison* [*Discipline and Punish – the Birth of the Prison*] – an account of the development of European penal systems. This work addressed not only the history of penitentiaries; it intended to enhance his readers' awareness of the oppressive institutional treatment received by groups of all kinds that are defined, relative to the status quo, as residing outside the social norm. Expanding on this theme, Foucault focused in his final years upon the historical construction of people's sexual identities, hoping to understand some of the fundamental institutional forces that shape the more feral aspects of the human psyche.

As the end of his life drew near, Foucault lectured frequently in the United States, visiting institutions such as Stanford University (1979), The University of Southern California (1981), The University of Vermont (1982), and the University of California at Berkeley (1979–83, on various occasions), where he continued to develop his work on human sexuality and the construction of human subjectivity. At an uncertain point during this time, Foucault contracted an immuno-deficiency disease, and his subsequent AIDS-related illness took his life on June 25, 1984, at age fifty-seven.

The experience of growth and liberation

To comprehend the intricate and nuanced texture of Foucault's writings, it is useful to reflect upon the experience of being released from a condition of

bondage. This could be as dramatic as the day of liberation at the end of a long imprisonment, or it could be the release from oppressive working conditions at the end of a drudging week, or it could be the feeling of bright anticipation at the beginning of a long-awaited retirement. More abstractly, it could be the experience of being released, or of releasing oneself, from a stifling set of social relationships, or from one's former patterns of narrow-minded thinking. Each of these cases typically involves a mental expansion, a sense of greater openness to new possibilities, and a distinct feeling of stepping beyond one's former boundaries. Within Foucault's thought, the ecstasy of liberation flows as a steady thematic undercurrent – one which is comparable to Camus's emphasis upon the 'flame of life.'

Globally considered, Foucault's revolution-friendly outlook focuses more on liberty, than upon either equality or fraternity: most of his writings are understandable as parts of a multifaceted inquiry into the experience of liberation, undertaken by a powerful and complicated mind. On the constraint-related side of this experience, Foucault examined the various sorts of institutional cages that societies can impose upon people, along with the kinds of psychological cages within which people can suffer in isolation. Hence arose his interest in mental illness, both of the individual and the social sort. He investigated the historical construction of these enclosures, and implicitly revealed to his readers, ways to unravel, deconstruct, undermine, or otherwise dissolve their oppressive quality.[337] By understanding how a structure of social constraint has been constructed, one can understand how to disassemble it, and thereby perceive more distinctly how such a cage need not permanently endure. As they appear in Foucault's writings, such analyses embody a sophisticated revolutionary and carnivalesque tenor.

On the less rule-governed, or more unlawful, side of the liberation experience, Foucault's interest was drawn to extraordinarily creative individuals, such as avant-garde artists and writers, especially during the 1960s. He regarded such people, who are often dissenters, renegades, outcasts, and outlaws, as having the talent and courage to break apart one of the most invisible and most difficult-to-dissolve cages in which we live, namely, the cage of consciousness that is literally informed by the language we inherit. Foucault was distinctly aware that if the very language a person inherits is sexist and racist, for example, then the person is left with little choice but to formulate their outlook on the world through an atmosphere of sexist and racist values, implicitly present in even the simplest verbal communications. In such situations, the occasional need for the outright transgression of established values can be justified, and outrageous artists often exercise their freedom to this very end.

Some of Foucault's own inquiries intended, quite fundamentally, to undermine conceptions that have remained relatively unquestioned for

centuries, and which have been so steadfast and 'natural,' that they have presented themselves as a second nature to most people, overlooked and remaining in the influential background. One of these – an idea that reaches back to ancient Greece, if not earlier – is the idea that there is an essence, or solid core, or basic self, or soul, to every human being, and that this core, moreover, is of a rational kind. Foucault also questioned the legitimacy of many entrenched social structures, challenging the idea that what a society labels 'normal,' or 'sane,' is of any everlasting validity. As did Roland Barthes, Foucault tended to dispute such claims, maintaining that the structures of societies, and of individual selves, are more arbitrary and malleable than most of us tend to imagine. Additionally inspirational to Foucault in this regard were the 'medical relativist' writings of Georges Canguilhem (1904–67), which argued that the concepts of 'normal' and 'pathological' were historically variable, value-steeped, and unavoidably charged with political, technological, and economic import.

Insofar as social structures are arbitrary, they are changeable. And insofar as they are changeable, less constraining possibilities remain open. So it might not follow that if a society defines a certain sexual practice – such as homosexuality – as 'wrong,' that it is necessarily, or is even reasonably, definable as such. Since socially dictated norms can nonetheless appear to be natural and written directly into the fabric of daily life, Foucault devoted much of his energy to showing, in very specific cases, that what is often taken to be natural is, in fact, no more than an alterable social fabrication. Within the regularities of our social world, he discovered more artistry, than natural law.

Foucault was also intrigued by the constructive significance of asymmetrical social relationships, especially within the context of clearly power-related interactions. His writings considered the standpoint of those in control, and they explored the mechanisms through which social discipline is maintained. In his later years, owing to Nietzsche's influence, Foucault investigated the ideas of *self*-control and *self*-discipline, noting that the distancing and control mechanisms that operate socially to dominate and oppress people are of a piece with the kind of control one can exert over oneself, although the latter may be used in a more constructive, creative, and self-liberating manner.

Upon first encounter, the array of subjects Foucault's writings encompass – medicine, madness, prisons, art, politics, sexuality, linguistics, history – forms a confusing and somewhat tangled fabric. Though diverse, he addressed most of these topics in connection with the idea of liberation, either by bringing to light constraints that are socially operative, but are nonetheless dimly perceived, or by revealing alternative styles of positive release from existing constraints. Foucault's particular and often peculiar choice of topics and historical episodes – among which includes an obscure story of a young man

who mass-murdered his entire family in 1835,[338] and an unforgettably bloody account of a public execution in 1750s France[339] – is further explained in reference to his interest in telling the stories of marginalized groups in connection with value-shaking historical events.

The rationale behind Foucault's expository method also issued from psychoanalytic roots: as Sigmund Freud convincingly showed, bringing to light what has been forcibly silenced, or exposing what lies at the peripheries of 'normality,' is often more truth-revealing than what one obtains when keeping close to the sanitized surface, resting content to inspect only what has been allowed to manifest itself with the social stamp of approval. Highlighting non-privileged phenomena can be a kind of emancipatory act: giving voice to those who remain in the background, and who have been muted by the locuses of established power, can liberate those people, or the ideas they represent, from institutional oppression, and indirectly reveal the issues which a society is too fearful to confront.

To appreciate the specific selection of topics upon which Foucault wrote, we can once again recall the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche, not only because the title of Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), established a model for Foucault's studies of the birth of the mental institution, the birth of medical perception, and the birth of the prison, but because Nietzsche himself prescribed the very intellectual programme of study that Foucault appears to have adopted. Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science* (1882):

> *Something for the Hard-Working Ones* – To whomever now wants to make a study of moral matters, there opens up a monstrous field of work. All sorts of passions must each be thought through and traced, each through times, peoples, great and small individuals; their entire reason and all their values and examinations of things must be brought to light! Until now, everything that has given color to existence still has no history: for where has there been a history of love, of greed, of jealousy, of conscience, of reverence, of cruelty? Even a comparative history of law, or even of punishment, is completely missing. Has anyone yet made as an object of research the various partitions of the day, the consequences of a regular scheduling of work, festivities, and rest? Do we know about the moral effects of different kinds of food? Is there a philosophy of nutrition? (The fuss that continually breaks out over the pros and cons of vegetarianism already shows that there is no such philosophy!) Have the experiences of people who live together, for example, in monasteries, been assembled? Has the dialect of marriage and friendship been set forth as of yet? The customs of scholars, of businesspeople, artists, craftspeople – have these yet found their theorists? It is so much to think about! Everything that

> until now people have considered to be their conditions of existence, and all of the reason, passion, and superstition involved in such considerations – has this been completely researched? Even the observation of the different growths which human instinct has had, and could have, in different moral climates, involves still too much work for the hardworking ones.[340]

It is striking to discover in this passing comment, a listing of key research topics taken up by Foucault during his later years. His book, *Discipline and Punish*, contains reflections on the history of cruelty and punishment, not to mention studies of regimentation and daily scheduling in connection with the development of the late eighteenth-century European soldier. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault also thought through the histories of monastery life, friendship, and marriage relationships, and generally examined practices of self-care, which included nutritional practices and alternative styles of daily regimen. Inspirations from Nietzsche diffused even further into the details of Foucault's studies, as we shall see.

Martin Heidegger's influence

When Foucault gave his last interview in June of 1984, he mentioned that Martin Heidegger had always been for him, 'the essential philosopher.' What especially sparked his enthusiasm, Foucault added, was Heidegger's thought in conjunction with Nietzsche's. Foucault studied the work of both philosophers in the 1950s, and his first publication – an essay entitled, 'Dream, Imagination and Existence' – was clearly influenced by the Heideggerian outlook. To appreciate Foucault's intellectual development, it is important to once again recall some themes in Heidegger's earlier and later philosophy.

At the beginning of *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927), Heidegger described the human being as one whose condition is special: unlike other living things, the human is a self-questioning being to whom its very existence presents itself as a problem. This ability to raise questions, as Foucault would say, amounts to a kind of power, for in questioning – especially in the questioning of authority – there resides a force of liberating change. And being able to question oneself, involves an implicit power to free oneself from one's former condition. If one is essentially self-questioning, then one is essentially self-freeing. Heidegger's characterization of the human being – an account that, as we have discussed earlier, seminally influenced the early twentieth-century French existentialist tradition in the figure of Jean-Paul Sartre – precipitates a lack of sympathy, not to mention a charge of inauthenticity, with

views that have ceased to subject themselves to question. Quite unlike Socrates, who was famous for claiming ignorance of the ultimate truth, those who advocate positions that no longer put themselves into question often claim to know absolutely. Such manifestly dogmatic positions include those that essentialize, compartmentalize, and ossify the human being within a cage of rigid definitions.

Since according to Heidegger, much of 'what is' – Being itself – remains hidden, undisclosed and unthought of, ever-new possibilities remain latent within the field of Being, and to be authentically human involves being questioning, being creative, and maintaining an open mind and a receptive attitude to possibilities unseen and previously unrealized. As a complement, then, to the idea of the human being as a fundamentally questioning being whose own possibilities are virtually endless, Heidegger conjoined a conception of reality itself that is multidimensional and filled with possibility. His thought, Derrida's criticisms notwithstanding, is thereby intended to be opposed to monolithic, determinate, authoritarian systems that aim to regiment all of reality, and Heidegger hoped to resist those outlooks which present themselves as an end-all or absolute view. Part and parcel of this open-minded attitude is Heidegger's worried observation that the scientific, literalistic, object-oriented, quantitative approach to the world can assume a totalizing, absolutist quality, and he cautioned against adopting this scientific approach in an exclusive way, such that it ends up constricting human potentialities.

Despite the freedom of thought Heidegger's outlook promotes, he also remained fully aware that human beings are not phantoms, and do not dwell timelessly in the cosmic air: we are living, breathing, historical beings who are thrown into the world at a specific time and place, and who are impressed and informed with a distinctive linguistic style. In this flesh-and-blood situatedness, Heidegger noted that whenever we understand anything, we cannot avoid resting our understanding upon tacit presuppositions that direct our questioning, and that provide our questions with an internal coherence and initial social meaning. In short, as much as we try to remain receptive to new possibilities, our questioning remains guided by the background presuppositions we inherit, many of which remain opaque to our immediate reflection. As a way to reveal, or to open, new dimensions of Being, Heidegger emphasized the value of artistic expression, and poetic expression in particular. Foucault's thought follows closely along this line especially during the 1960s, when he held that the literary arts can enlarge the often-cramped and routine compartments of language, which Heidegger sometimes more reverently referred to as the 'house of Being.' Foucault also recognized historical studies as another such means of liberation, and he engaged primarily in this style of outlook-expansion.

Many of Heidegger's ideas are implicit in Nietzsche's texts, but Heidegger intensified, accentuated and developed Nietzschean insights with a distinctive emphasis upon existential, historical, and in his later period, linguistic, expression. These were ideas with which Foucault naturally sympathized, and one can imagine how the Heidegger–Nietzsche amalgam doubly impressed itself upon Foucault. Similarly, Foucault believed that we are fundamentally historical beings, and that if we are to gain any self-understanding, it is crucial that we identify the often-constraining background presuppositions that have been passed on to us by previous generations. Only then can we experience increased freedom and growth in a more self-aware manner, for Foucault held that it is imperative to question these historical inheritances, if only to allow ourselves as individuals the space to recreate ourselves and self-determine ourselves to a greater extent, in view of the necessity of some kind of social structuring that inevitably carries with it a certain degree of oppression.

Foucault as 'archaeologist'

Upon hearing that a person is an 'archaeologist' – someone whose work is to reconstruct a cultural lifestyle from a set of physical artifacts – it is easy to conjure up images of ancient ruins, pottery, arrowheads, cave paintings, stone temples, or mysterious tombs. As opposed to historical studies that center upon written texts, archaeology becomes crucial when a cultural group has left no written records. Some even believe that archaeology is more scientific and objective than the study of old texts, because so many of these texts – especially the ancient ones – express interests that are predominantly political or religious, as opposed to purely documentary. Describing one's work as 'archaeological' as opposed to 'historical,' then, can lend it an authority that is associated with the recognized authority of science, even if one's work is independent of scientific inquiries proper.

In Foucault's writings of the 1960s, the word 'archaeology' becomes increasingly more pronounced as the years pass. In 1963, he published a book whose subtitle was, 'an archeology of medical perception;' in 1966, he presented 'an archeology of the human sciences;' in 1969, he explored 'the archeology of knowledge' itself. With such works, Foucault came forth as a scholar on an 'archaeological dig,' searching for overlooked treasures among the dust-covered texts in the well-stocked French national library. Foucault's subtitles and titles also suggest that if we focus on the term 'archaeology,' we can gain a clear sense of the perspective from which he was writing during this important segment of his career.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault characterized his idea of 'archaeology' as follows:

> Quite obviously, such an analysis does not belong to the history of ideas or of science: it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory become possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards. I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an 'archaeology.'[341]

Rather than revealing a people's daily lifestyle, as is done by traditional archaeologists, Foucault-as-archaeologist aimed to reveal a people's knowledge-style, bringing to light the guiding background assumptions that operate prior to any assertions that this or that fact happens to be known. From the philosophy of Immanuel Kant we can recognize the term '*a priori*' in Foucault's characterization of 'archaeology' – a discipline Foucault defined as belonging to neither history nor science in any straightforward way. Kant's inquiries, although they differed from Foucault's insofar as they professed to have a quality of universality and necessity for all human beings, were also neither historical nor scientific: already, in the late 1700s, Kant considered not bits and pieces of factual knowledge; he sought to unveil the underlying structures of the mind that constitute a network of conceptual presuppositions for human knowledge, against which, in terms of which, and by means of which, all contingent facts about the world could arise to begin with.

As much as Foucault was inspired by Kant, he gave Kant's search for the universal and necessary *a priori* conditions of human knowledge a modern twist, for he spoke of a 'historical' *a priori* to be uncovered by his archaeological investigations, rather than a traditionally universal and necessary one. This modification of Kant's terminology reveals Foucault's more unassuming

view that there might not be a single, invariant knowledge-style that is common to all humans, or a common background of 'human nature,' but rather only a multiplicity of knowledge-styles that vary according to the specific time and place. Foucault's coining of the term, 'historical *a priori*,' in place of Kant's more timeless '*a priori*,' displays both Foucault's Kantian roots, side-by-side with Foucault's departure from Kant – a departure partially derived from Martin Heidegger's historical and existential sensitivity, and one that allowed Foucault to make later use of compatible insights from Nietzsche.

Specifically, as noted above, one of Heidegger's contributions to the theory of understanding and interpretation (also referred to as 'hermeneutics')[342] is the idea that whenever we understand something, or say that we know something, this understanding rests 'always already' upon interpretively guiding historical presuppositions. Owing to their generality and obviousness, these presuppositions tend to remain hidden from us, for Heidegger observed that our background presuppositions are often invisible, precisely because they are too close to us, as they function silently and unnoticeably. In a clear sense, then, these customarily overlooked presuppositions, or prejudgments, can be said to constitute a significant portion of our 'historical *a priori*.' Foucault's work of the 1960s can be regarded as a Kantian–Heideggerian attempt to reveal in detail exactly what these presuppositions were for various fields of knowledge and time periods. His work during this time was Kantian, insofar as it aimed to establish the *a priori* conditions for understanding in various fields. It was also Heideggerian, insofar as he conceived of the conditions for understanding as being historically rooted. 'Knowledge-styles,' in effect, became 'interpretation-styles,' within Foucault's view.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault embarked forcefully on an archaeological exploration in search of the historical conditions underlying the emergence of some key institutions within European culture, and especially in France. He focused upon the various social definitions and attitudes that were directed toward a socially discredited group of outsiders, namely, those whom the prevailing society at the time labelled as 'mad.' Depending upon the historical period, Foucault observed, the group of individuals included within this category varied. During the Age of Enlightenment (also known as the 'Age of Reason,' or for Foucault, the 'Classical Age') this group included not only people who would today be classified as mentally ill; it included also the physically ill, the criminally active, the unemployed, and the aged. At a point that began roughly in the mid-1600s, all were grouped together and confined indiscriminately as 'the mad.'

That the Age of Reason was also the age of world-transforming scientific discovery is worthy of note, for Foucault draws our attention to the significant

social fallout that issued from the very same mentality that led to indisputable and amazing advances in general knowledge and technological achievement. As the concept of 'reason' reached a level of cultural hegemony – a conception characterized by an impartial, disinterested, personally detached, measurement-centered, order-focused, regimenting style of thought – those 'unreasonable' people whose behavior did not measure up to this conception of reason were soon shouldered over to the peripheries of social legitimacy. Since humans were conceived of as rational beings, it was short work to define such non-typical people as subhuman, or as near-animals. In the 1700s, they were literally confined in cages within which, through active manipulation, they would be reformed, if possible, into hard-working, reasonable, predictable, law-abiding citizens. According to Foucault, the social role of 'absolute outcast' that had been assigned to the lepers in earlier ages, was played by the 'mad' in the Age of Enlightenment. In more recent times, on the political front, such outcasts have been referred to as 'guerillas'[343] or 'terrorists.'[344]

At the dawn of the 1800s, homestead-like mental asylums were born from an attitude that more discriminatingly distinguished the mentally ill from the criminals and from the physically ill. For Foucault, this change in general attitude did not imply any noticeably improved treatment for the mentally ill, since those confined were treated now as moral outcasts, even though they were no longer treated violently as subhumans. Rather than being manhandled into more socially conforming behavior through physical punishment, as had been the previous practice, the mentally ill were made to feel guilty as they became the victims of more subtle techniques of psychological abuse, such as the 'silent treatment.'

Madness and Civilization documented the social tragedy that arose when the classical idea that humans are essentially rational animals was intensified to the point where it became a tool of oppression and social exclusion. With this first book completed, and having described the position of those who were subjected to medical authority, Foucault then considered the flip-side of this situation in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Here, he observed how the growing authority of medical doctors paralleled the rise of scientific thinking, showing how their adoption of a supposedly impartial and deeply knowing 'medical gaze' provided them with an authority reminiscent of what was formerly held by the Christian priesthood.

In *The Order of Things – An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Foucault extended his historical examinations to account for the birth of human sciences such as psychology, sociology, along with the analysis of literature and mythology. In this effort, he crystallized in greater detail the global knowledge-styles or '*epistemes*' of the respective Renaissance, classical, and modern periods, mainly to emphasize that if one is to understand history,

social structures, and the individuals who operate within those social parameters, it is necessary to focus, not on timeless and unchanging essences, but upon processes of emergence, transformation, and erosion.

Foucault would later reconsider the validity of his sweeping references to three different 'ages,' each with its own peculiar, and permeating, knowledge-style, but in the 1960s he remained centered upon the project of identifying the global thought-categories relative to specific epochs – their respective historical *a priori* structures – just as Kant had tried to identify the *a priori* thought-categories relative to the human being in general. He claimed in particular that the knowledge-style of Western culture up until the end of the 1500s, was based on the ability to discern resemblances among things. Within this mode of thought, one could, for instance, hope to ease a headache by eating walnuts, because the brain-like shape of walnuts suggested that they might be related to the head. Or, one could hope to inflict damage on an enemy, or bring good fortune upon a friend, by inflicting damage upon or by taking care of, an effigy, because the negative or positive attention to the representation would be thought to be causally transferable to the intended object, owing to the resemblance between the effigy and the object it represented. According to Foucault, such an essentially anthropomorphic and quasi-magical knowledge-style was relatively unproductive, since resemblances can be perceived endlessly, and can be perceived in connection with the most practically unrelated things.

The classical period of the 1600s–1700s was the setting for the physical sciences, and in knowledge-style, Foucault distinguished this period as previously mentioned: the classical mind appeared to him to be order-focused, measurement-centered, abstracting, universalizing, and fundamentally impartial in its style of observation. A paragon example can be found in Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), whose theoretical understanding of nature took care to distinguish sharply between the directly measurable, relatively invariant qualities of physical objects (e.g., the weight of a cube of sugar) from their more variable subjective effects (e.g., the sweet taste of the sugar), and which led to the effective development of mathematical, objective expressions of physical laws. One of the ground-level assumptions of this knowledge-style is that the inquirer ought to, and can, remain completely disengaged from the object observed, such as to perceive the object as it is in itself, untouched and unaffected by the observer's presence. Within this scientifically oriented outlook, the observer turns into a ghostlike manipulator of situations and things, in an attempt to bring their material essence to measurable light. As the classical period extended forward in time, this scientific mentality was directed explicitly toward living things and to human beings, leading to the development of the biological, psychological, and sociological sciences.

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked the outset of the modern age – an age characterized by a more acute sense of history, and thereby, of a deeper sensitivity to the fluctuating features of human experience. With a more closely attuned awareness to the passing of time, modern thinkers experienced the breakdown of the classical quest for timeless universalities, and developed more provisional, conditional, and restrained outlooks that displayed a more pronounced awareness of the theoretician's own contingent existence and intrinsic finitude. Foucault himself often embodied this awareness, as he reflected on the status of his own writings as twentieth-century historical artifactual constructions, knowing full-well how time would eventually wash them away.

Foucault's final book of the decade, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), expresses the underlying investigative procedure of his earlier books in a linguistically focused manner: he speaks in a more explicit and concentrated way about various discourses and 'discourse formations' that are typical for different epochs, and refers to his search for the historical *a priori*s of different time periods as an inquiry into the underlying practices that constitute the prevailing discourses. What is distinctive about Foucault's description of his project at this stage, is not only his more accentuated linguistic focus, but also his growing awareness that language has an inexhaustible, complicated, if not convoluted and incongruous, multidimensional texture, and that it will not suffice to identify particular spirits of the various time periods. He began to realize more exactly how historical situations are thoroughly complicated: many tensions, alternative and interweaving strands of development, complementary themes, and variable rates of cultural change all figure into any concrete understanding of a historical subject matter, and these tend to foil the quest for global generalities. Foucault's understanding of historical complexity matched Derrida's and Barthes's multi-aspected understanding of linguistic complexity, in other words. A conviction that historical studies require an extremely discriminating awareness – an awareness which is also similar to that of a connoisseur or wine-taster – at this point began to develop a force in Foucault's work, and it led him to transform his earlier search for the historical *a priori* into a more self-conscious attention to nuance and detail that would be characteristic of an aesthete. It was the kind of discriminating mentality he found exemplified in the theorist of the 'will to power,' Friedrich Nietzsche.

Genealogy, power/knowledge, and surveillance

Foucault had a subtle, analytic mind coupled with a daring personality, and his lively awareness of the interweavings, incongruencies, tensions, and multivalences within linguistic phenomena was matched by a similar perception of cultural phenomena in general. For any historical subject – whether it concerned

the notion of what an 'author' happens to be, or whether it concerned the development of penal systems – Foucault was able to reveal a complicated tissue of antecedent historical phenomena whose mutual influence and overlap could explain the emergence of that subject within some cultural context.

Such historical studies are comparable to tracing the blood-lineage of a person back for centuries into the ever-complicating and increasingly tangled roots of a genealogical tree – not for the sake of unveiling some single, original pair of ancestors such as Adam and Eve, but to show that any individual existence stems from hundreds, if not thousands, of often unrelated and often widely divergent, personal histories. And indeed, during the 1970s, Foucault described his style of intellectual inquiry as 'genealogical' in this very sense. The terminological inspiration was from Friedrich Nietzsche, whose *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) stood, in terms of his corresponding historical method, as exemplary for Foucault. Owing to Foucault's earlier influence by Kant, it is worth noting here that an antecedent to the Nietzschean idea of 'genealogy' is that of a legal 'deduction' – a term used philosophically and famously by Kant in the 1780s. In the centuries preceding Kant's lifetime, legal deductions were the official, sometimes book-length, inquiries into the history of a fought-over river or parcel of land, for the purpose of tracing the object back to some past owner and establishing a legal title thereby.

The most well-known work of this period is Foucault's *Discipline and Punish – the Birth of the Prison* [*Surveiller et punir – Naissance de la prison* (1975)]. This was a historical exposé and social critique of the French penal system, for among his many observations, Foucault noted that prisons do not diminish the crime rate, and that the overall stance of those who institute prisons has remained relatively unenlightened, not having changed much since the early 1800s. In connection with Foucault's theoretical approach, *Discipline and Punish* is important insofar as the idea of 'power' – another concept traceable to Nietzsche's influence – can be seen to have moved into the heart of his thinking, such that the notions of discourse formation and *episteme*, although not completely abandoned, faded into the background.

During this phase of his career, Foucault regarded the presence of power in society in a somewhat negative light, insofar as he understood social power to be fundamentally freedom-restricting and manipulative. It was not so much individuals, however, whose power he regarded as a force of domination; it was the power inherent in an institutional framework, constituted by a set of established social practices. It is these faceless social practices, deriving exclusively from no one in particular, and yet adopted by segments of the population in general – by 'them,' as Heidegger would say – that he saw as being responsible for molding people into various types suitable for the predictable and efficient functioning of the society.

A clear example of the social power Foucault had in mind, is illustrated in the formation of soldiers in the late eighteenth century. Before this time, if a person happened to have, among other qualities, a strong body, natural agility, and an alert manner, that person was regarded as naturally suited to be a soldier. Soldiers were found, rather than made. In later years, when 'the classical age discovered the body as the object and target of power,' people slowly became regarded as more akin to objects that could be manipulated, shaped, trained, and generally subject to use, transformation, and improvement. Social disciplinary practices of soldier-making thus became the norm, as people were increasingly seen as pieces of clay to be shaped. The practice of reforming prisoners by trying to reshape their mentalities was comparable, and was also generalizable: in a broad way, many social institutions, including the most well-intentioned ones, such as educational systems, could be understood as employing the oppressive and manipulative techniques of the prison.

In accord with the thought that many social institutions have a carceral, or prison-like, quality to them, Foucault observed that one of the essential functions of a prison-keeper is that of keeping the prisoners under surveillance. Within this context, Foucault gave an extended discussion of a remarkable architectural design for a perfect prison by the English philosopher, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). This 'panopticon' (all-seeing device) was a doughnut-shaped building at whose center was located an observation tower – one that allowed its occupant to keep simultaneous watch on all of the cells in the surrounding dormitories. Unlike the dark, private, dungeons of the old days, the prisoners' cells were to be completely illuminated for the purposes of perpetual monitoring 'like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible.'[345] The goal was 'to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.'[346] Here, the observational standpoint's power tends towards an almost superhuman magnitude, since it intends to survey, record, control and assess, everyone's movements at once. Since the inmate is totally seen, while not being able to see the observer, and since the observer can always see everything without ever being seen, the inmate always feels the pressure of the observer's power, whether or not he or she is actually being observed.

Foucault's insights into the ways institutional structures maintain and perpetuate their power can be extended easily beyond the prison setting. To appreciate the contemporary applicability of Foucault's analysis, we can reflect upon the feeling of surveillance generated by one-way glass windows or video cameras in civilian settings – feelings generated quite independently of whether anyone happens to be behind the window or whether the camera is in

fact operating – and the increasing technological advances that allow those with institutional authority to monitor telephone conversations and other kinds of electronic communications without detection. The principle is the same: social institutions exert their power by instilling the idea that those under control can be monitored, or placed under invisible surveillance at any time. In this respect, Foucault's analysis of panopticism – the principle of the all-seeing eye – continues to be of widespread relevance. Just as the classical-age physicist aimed to observe material things in a way such that his or her presence remained invisible and without affecting any changes upon the objects observed, the perfect social monitor, or technician of behavior, aims to observe people in a way such that his or her presence remains invisible to, and non-interacting with, those under surveillance.

It is important to note that in some situations, the panoptic frame of mind can be put to morally good use. It would be desirable in a hospital setting, for instance, where constant electronic monitors on all of the patients' bodily conditions were fully centralized at a central location for efficiency, thus shortening the response time in the case of emergency. Panopticism can become objectionable, though, when the surveillance style is used to control sectors of social activity where people have not chosen to sacrifice a major proportion of their autonomy.

Another of Foucault's influential ideas that took form during the 1970s is that 'power' and 'knowledge' always arise in an interdependency, reciprocity, and experiential amalgam with one another, just as 'color' always accompanies 'shape' in a visual experience. Part of the motivation for Foucault's association between power and knowledge issued from his concern with the political status of scientific knowledge. He observed that not only does scientific knowledge provide a power over nature, it provides an institutional power to those who develop, manage, and control the scientific knowledge.

The intellectual atmosphere of Foucault's approach is down-to-earth, and he retained an existentialist spirit. His analyses of key philosophical concepts such as 'truth,' 'power,' 'language,' and 'knowledge' are all grounded within the details of concrete historical contexts. Trying to detach some non-historical, timelessly true, completely literalistic, universal and unalterable conceptual structure from the infinitely complicated network of real-life happenings was antagonistic to Foucault's understanding, and in this respect, he resisted theorizing about absolute truths or about knowledge that is imagined to be completely detached from concrete circumstances. Since daily circumstances unavoidably involve social, political, and cultural dimensions, he insisted that any concrete understanding of knowledge and truth must recognize how these ideas are inextricably enmeshed within, infiltrated, and modified by changing

historical conditions. He even recognized that the concept of 'power' – the central theme of his theorizing during the 1970s – remains empty if it is thought in the absence of articulating the specific kinds and circumstances of the power under consideration.

In 1977, in an interview on 'The History of Sexuality,' Foucault made a remark that has often been quoted and often misinterpreted. He stated that he was well aware that he had never written anything but fictions.[347] Standing by itself, this suggests that Foucault did not believe in 'truth,' and that his outlook is nihilistic. He continued in the next breath, however, to reveal a very different meaning by stating that he did not intend to say that truth is therefore absent. Which is to suggest that truth is expressible through fictional discourse, or, stated differently, that artistic, figurative, mythic, metaphoric, and literary expression can express truth equally as well, or perhaps even better, than purely literalistic language. This was also Nietzsche's position. It can also be attributed to Derrida.

If, indeed, the true state of affairs is multi-dimensional, allusive, fluctuating, and is not exhaustibly expressible within any finite linguistic framework, then we can read Foucault as someone who would have received with congeniality, the Daoist statement that 'the Way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way.'[348] Less remotely, we can read Foucault as a person who believed, with Nietzsche, and with Derrida, that the truth cannot be fully attained from a head-on, literalistic approach, but must also be brought forth with quiet charm, using indirect, artistic, and even mythic language.

In 1970 and in 1978, Foucault visited Japan, motivated in part by his interest in Zen Buddhism. Foucault's interest in Zen had at least three aspects, the first of which is that, like Zen, some forms of Christianity advocate stringent disciplinary techniques for the purposes of spiritual advancement. From the standpoint of comparative cultural practices, Foucault found that the Zen Buddhist monastic regimen stood in a striking parallel to Christian monastic discipline. In Zen as well, one can see embodied the Latin dictum, *laborare est orare*, 'to work is to pray.' Second, the Buddhistic position that all existence is conditioned or contingent, along with the Buddhistic denial of a substantial self – positions which are opposed to fixed conceptual definitions – are compatible with Foucault's anti-Cartesian, more nominalistic standpoint.

Third, that Zen is a way of life, and bears a kinship to Foucault's understanding of philosophy as a spiritual exercise or 'practice of freedom' – a practice to be grounded on the principle of self-detachment, or self-distancing – was another factor in Foucault's interest in Zen. Moreover, although the following point remains undocumented, one can also imagine that the specifically Zen Buddhist style of awareness – a 'being clearly aware of everything

now at once' – could have been a further point of interest for Foucault, especially in connection with his interest in panopticism. The Zen Master, in being extraordinarily open to, and hyper-aware of, all perceptual details in a kind of wakefulness that is both childlike and wisdom-informed, can be regarded as a positive version of the panoptic mentality that preoccupied Foucault during this time period. In Zen, one aims to be absolutely observant for the purposes of apprehending the vivid, existentially fluctuating presence of the world; in panopticism, one aims to be absolutely observant for the purpose of maximizing one's control over what is observed. In the former case, one lets the world freely be, as Heidegger urged us to do in his later writings; in the contrasting panoptic mentality, one leans on the world heavily. Since Foucault was pragmatic to the core, and since he knew that Zen Buddhism was the religion of many samurai, one could expect him to have been fascinated by a practical kind of power that can stem from what is, on the face of things, an exceedingly spiritual mentality.

Self-control and self-artistry

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Foucault developed his understanding of 'power' in a manner more consistent with his general assumption that the world is complicated, fluctuating, and multi-dimensional, rather than simple, static, and essentially definable. Although his historical investigations had embodied this idea well in their details, his guiding conception of power, as noted above, tended to be conceived somewhat monolithically as an oppressive and manipulative force impressed upon individuals by established institutional practices. In *The History of Sexuality*, volume I (*La volenté du savoir* [*The Will to Knowledge*], 1976), however, Foucault explicitly advanced a theoretically more informative and positive conception of power as a dynamic network of social forces. These were conceived of as diverse, overlapping, sometimes conflicting, and sometimes mutually supporting networks, operating in ever-changing 'matrices of transformation.' His view was that power, although everywhere, is not singular, and that one can never be 'outside' of power. To the contrary, one is always already enmeshed in specific power relationships.

The explicit theme for Foucault's final period – one that was implicit in his earlier work – can be expressed by the question, 'How is self-knowledge possible?' This is a traditional question, but Foucault's way of understanding it involved a unique mix of historical inquiry and philosophical depth: he considered, in usually meticulous detail, how fluctuating historical conditions have formed people's self-conceptions, and with this knowledge he reflected upon how people within such alternative historical constellations, have

examined themselves. For example, in his study of the scientifically centered qualities of the modern period, he described how people were implicitly taught to regard themselves as potential objects of scientific inquiry, and how they thereby reproduced of their own accord, forms of self-understanding consistent with the idea that they were objects that could be thoroughly measured, predicted, and controlled.

Foucault's method is distinctive, not only in its attention to historical detail and its acute analysis of how self-images, or subjectivities, are constructed, but in its sensitivity to the self-reinforcing mechanisms of social-value perpetuation. Insofar as a person tends to reproduce the world in his or her own self-image, there arises the accompanying effect of the person's recreating, duplicating, and perpetuating the very social structures that significantly created that person's identity to begin with. This same kind of reciprocity-relationship, at one remove, can be seen in Foucault's conception of 'power-knowledge,' for power and knowledge are mutually reinforcing in a similar way: 'It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.'[349]

Emerging from Foucault's focus upon the social construction of the subject was a more artistic and creative dimension to power, namely, the idea that people have a measure of self-control and can 'self-create' themselves according to their own designs. Although social practices can embody an implicit dominating force over the individual, power also flows through the individual and this can be expressed as a power of self-conquest, self-monitoring, self-formation, and self-legislation. So just as Foucault had explored the 'techniques of behavior' associated with the prison and the panoptic mentality, he later explored the 'technologies of the self' in an effort to understand the more creative side of how personal identities are constructed. In the year before he died, Foucault remarked: 'But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?'[350]

In his final years, Foucault complemented his more austere, detached vocabularies of 'strategies,' 'technologies,' and 'techniques,' with the more graceful and freedom-inspiring idea of an 'aesthetics of existence' or art of life, where the main concern was to give one's life a self-determined, aesthetic appeal, and unique style. Once again, Friedrich Nietzsche stands as the inspiration, for in the first section of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche described how people themselves become works of art when engaged ecstatically in the musical activities of song and dance. A decade later, he reiterated the same theme, providing a detailed articulation to the thought later expressed only in passing by Foucault. Nietzsche wrote in 1882:

> *One thing is necessary* – 'To give style' to one's character – a great and unusual art! Those who practice this have an overall view of what, in their nature offers strengths and weaknesses, and they then fit them together according to an artistic plan, until each appears as art and reason, where even weaknesses delight the eye. Here, a large mass of second nature is brought in; there, a piece of original nature is taken out – both with extended practice and daily work on it. Here, an ugliness which could not be taken out is hidden; there, it is given a new sublime interpretation. Much of what is vague, which resists being formed, is saved to be used for views far ahead – it ought to indicate what is wide and vast. Finally, when the work is completed, it becomes clear how the directing force of a single taste mastered over and formed everything large and small: whether the taste was a good one or a bad one, means less than one imagines – it is enough that it is a *single* taste![351]

Nietzsche's personalized and individualistic rendition of the art of life contrasts revealingly with Foucault's more socially and historically centered version. Although Foucault was also interested in the care of the self, he understood the construction of personal identity by focusing primarily on group behaviors, in keeping with his general thought that people are molded significantly from prevailing social forces. In Foucault, one reads less about the daily regimens of specific individuals, and more about the techniques of self-mastery employed by groups such as monastic and philosophic orders, whose common goal was to establish a shared hygiene and spirituality. In this respect, the idea of liberation that one encounters in Foucault's later works conveys less of an anarchistic tone, for it is tempered by the idea that rule-governedness is a condition for, and a path towards, freedom. One can say that Foucault took seriously Cicero's observation that freedom is the participation in power, rather than a self-isolating disengagement from it.

Liberation and social self-construction

Foucault's predominant intellectual style was masterfully discriminating. It could even be called 'atomizing' or 'disintegrating.' And as noted above, he had the ability to take virtually any, apparently clear, simply understandable and univocal concept, and, like an analytical chemist, reveal how its constitution was in fact complicated, not to mention changing and potentially unstable. In addition, Foucault was also an extraordinarily reflective individual: as one surveys his writings, one can see his own powers of discrimination being applied to his previous work – almost in an act of self-overcoming – to reformulate his

views in a way that relied less and less upon univocal and universalizing categories. He became more authentically nominalist as time went on.

We have also seen that Foucault's transformation of thematic emphasis from the 1960s to early 1970s led to the emergence of the idea of power in his writings. But just as he initially conceived of time-periods and knowledge-styles in a univocal and conceptually smoothed-out manner, Foucault would initially conceive of power in a noticeably monolithic way as well, namely, as an oppressive power that was fundamentally antagonistic to freedom. As he became more discerning and discriminating in his reflections on power, Foucault soon re-expressed his view to reveal that power is an active, 'productive' energy within individuals, and that it manifests itself moreover, in dynamic and entangled constellations whose embodiment is not a matter incidental to understanding what power is, but is constitutive of power itself.[352]

Foucault made corresponding refinements in connection with the idea of knowledge: he believed that one cannot speak meaningfully of a specific time period's knowledge-style in the abstract, since an understanding of any knowledge-style must be located explicitly within a certain historical constellation of power. In the work characteristic of his final years, Foucault's discriminating outlook led him to speak not globally about subjectivity or about sexuality in general, but about many different subjectivities and different sexualities, all of which are linked into broad-based historical studies of the time and place within which they originated.

Insofar as Foucault's thought can be centered around the concept of liberation, his discriminating attitude of the conceptual connoisseur – if this is described more pragmatically as a 'disintegrationist' attitude – can be understood as a force directed toward revolutionary change. Disintegrating some given structure need not be construed as a purely destructive act, especially when the structure is as intangible as a conceptual structure, or is as malleable as a set of practices. To the extent that past forms can be kept in memory, Foucault's disintegrationist thought can expand our horizons, such that we can regard our previous conceptual structures as steps along the way to a more comprehensive awareness. Neither need such a view entail a progressive, linear, conception of human development, for myriad possibilities present themselves at each step of the way – artistic creation and influence is by nature unpredictable – and increased comprehension can occur along many alternative routes.

A standing problem for Foucault's thought, however, concerns whether his perspective is itself significantly constraining. That is, we can ask whether Foucault's efforts to explain our present styles of subjectivity in reference to the social forces that constructed them actually succeed in breaking away from

the more self-centered Cartesian style of philosophizing that had been a continuing legacy in France. To be sure, Foucault had strong doubts about whether there is any invariant integrity to experiential subjects, and he also resisted exclusively analyzing the individual subject from the first-person, phenomenological, or 'inside' viewpoint. He clearly preferred to comprehend the individual consciousness in reference to various styles of historically constituted group-consciousnesses. The cluster of group-consciousnesses that constituted Michel Foucault, though, themselves appear to have determined him to prefer a group-centered and linguistically centered, as opposed to individualistically centered, style of understanding. Whether or not the parameters of his socially centered orientation provide for the possibility of significant self-transcendence remains a question, because the extent to which sociality and linguisticality are foundational remains debatable.

To appreciate the significance of the problem of self-transcendence in Foucault's thought as alluded to above, we can reflect upon Foucault's intellectual style, the mood of which is captured in the two words, 'discipline' and 'control.' These words convey an assortment of resonances, but the thoughts of manipulation, technique, domination, and perhaps also strategy and tactics – all of which figure prominently in Foucault's analyses – are close to the core. There is a distinct objectivity of temperament to be discerned here, arising even within Foucault's discussions of alternative attitudes toward oneself – discussions that center around the ideas of 'self-control,' 'self-discipline,' 'technologies of the self,' and 'self-regimentation.' In sum, the objectifying tone of cybernetic thinking can be seen to inhabit, and to inhibit, Foucault's discriminating and disintegrationist perspective, despite its emancipatory designs. Foucault was a reflective thinker, but in his efforts to understand and to transcend the objectifying mentality, he ended up taking an objectifying view toward the objectifying style of mind.

Looking down upon the objectifying standpoint in an intellectually cool, distanced, and non-committal manner, however, does not allow one to escape it, for the stance of analytic detachment is itself objectifying, and it reiterates the style of mind from which one seeks to be detached. In his life-long effort to achieve a balance between structured discipline of science and creative freedom of art, it would appear that discipline tended to prevail and that liberation remained only a more distant prescription. That Foucault was a true advocate of self-determination and practical self-mastery, though, will remain one of the inspirations of his legacy.

A constructive way to understand Foucault's attention to rule-governedness in connection with his interest in freedom, and a way to address some of Foucault's critics who regard his most thoroughly considered

position as an amoral 'might makes right' variety, or as either anarchist, nihilist, or pessimist, is to regard his final work on the care of the self as an overture to a political philosophy, or 'care of the group.' The question has been often asked how Foucault can legitimate the political judgments he frequently made. Consistent with Kant and Hegel, and consistent with those contemporary theorists who, inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, insist upon invoking a universal rationality as a guide to political judgment, Foucault's association between rule-governedness and self-artistry would put him squarely on the side of those who claim that purely arbitrary, essentially whimsical, decisions are, in fact, unjustified, if no commitment to some set of rules will follow.

But just as Foucault spoke of a historical *a priori* in connection with the knowledge-styles of a time period, one can say that political styles are also historically variable. Moreover, the general idea that one is only free, if one acts consistently according to laws one has made oneself, or as a group, can be seen to be consistent with, and might even issue from, Foucault's thoughts on self-artistry. The main difference between Foucault and the Enlightenment-style thinkers would be his insistence that it is only possible to formulate rules or institute legislation that is suitable to the times and situation within which one lives. Exercising freedom within such a situation would not, then, be the anarchistic freedom to do whatever one wants whenever one wants, nor would it be a freedom in accord with a timeless pattern of rock-solid, self-evident, rationally grounded constants. It would be the freedom to act in accord with the historically specific laws one has made for oneself – laws whose optimal formulation require a sense of taste, discrimination, and most importantly, wisdom. That there are no determinate rules for either artistic genius or for political wisdom is a commonplace idea, and it remains part of Foucault's wisdom to insist that an allegiance to a mechanical and universalistic conception of reason reveals a distinct lack of wisdom, if only because circumstances change, and because changing circumstances make people who they are.

Selected works of Michel Foucault

1961 (age 35): *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* [*Madness and Civilization – A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*]

1963 (age 37): *Naissance de la clinique – Une archéologie du régard médical* [*The Birth of the Clinic – An Archeology of Medical Perception*]

1966 (age 40): *Les mots and les choses – Une archéologie des sciences humaines* [*The Order of Things – An Archeology of the Human Sciences*]

1969 (age 43): *L'archéologie du savoir [The Archeology of Knowledge*]
1975 (age 49): *Surveiller et punir – Naissance de la prison* [*Discipline and Punish – the Birth of the Prison*]
1976 (age 50): *La volenté de savoir. Vol. 1 of histoire de la sexualité* [*The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*]
1984 (age 58): (1) *L'usage des plaisirs. Vol. 2 of Histoire de la sexualité* [*The History of Sexuality, Volume II: The Use of Pleasure*]
(2) *Le souci de soi. Vol. III of Histoire de la sexualité* [*The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self*]