

Foucault, Genealogy, Ethics

CHARLES E. SCOTT

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

By establishing the sciences of life while, at the same time, forming a certain self-knowledge, the human being altered itself as a living being by taking on the character of a rational subject acquiring the power to act on itself, changing its living conditions and its own life [There is a] kinship between the discourse on limit-experience, when it was a matter of the subject transforming itself, and the discourse on the transformation of the subject itself through the construction of a knowledge. (Foucault, 2000, 296)¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

The question of ethics in the context of Foucault's thought is at once a question of knowledge. Although his works address a wide variety of things, they are sharply focused by the dynamics and structures of different ways of knowing. And although there is in his work neither a "medical ethics" nor any other kind of professional ethical inquiry, it does form an extraordinarily persistent series of studies on the orders of power that compose orders of knowledge that play crucial roles in regulating and often subjugating human behavior. Power structures constitute valences, that is, combinatory events that bring things together in certain ways. We may call these structures of power in Foucault's studies operative values in knowledge. Usually he wanted to describe the ways certain configurations of power/knowledge functioned in disciplined knowledge and the institutions governed by and productive of such knowledge. These descriptions do not constitute either a

Address correspondence to: Charles E. Scott, PhD, Department of Philosophy, 111 Furman Hall, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37240, USA. E-mail: charles.e.scott@Vanderbilt.Edu

normative ethic or a position regarding moral judgment and obligation. I will discuss this observation further in the penultimate section. For now I begin by noting that throughout Foucault's work, we confront in unique and forceful ways questions about values that organize people and things and values that operate definitively in formal knowledge and in practical recognitions and judgments as well as in institutional regulations, omissions, silences, obliviousness, and above all in truth and goodness.

In this discussion, I will introduce some of the leading characteristics of Foucault's work. I will cluster these characteristics around the connections of knowledge and value and in the context of Foucault's conviction that all ways of knowing constitute basic problems of value with direct implications for social and individual lives. In the language I will use, knowing is ethical activity. Thus, although Foucault does not "do" biomedical ethics, his work has a strong relevance for medical knowledge and practice as well as for the knowledge and practice of biomedical ethicists. My goal is to make Foucault's thought accessible for those not expert in it and to open the way for its deliberation in medically related contexts.

At one time interpreters of Foucault often insisted that his work is divided between archeological and genealogical studies. Archeology accentuates the epistemic architecture, for example, in histories of madness, disciplined knowledge, or clinical care and science. In *The Order of Things*, he says that he is doing an "archeological inquiry" into "two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture" (Foucault, 1973b, xxii), and *The Birth of the Clinic* has the subtitle, "An Archeology of the Medical Gaze" (Foucault, 1973a). In his 1972 book, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he accepts the word as defining his approach up to that time. When people, however, made the distinction between archeology and genealogy sharply differential, they sometimes find archeological structures overly formal and static, whereas they find his genealogical studies dynamic in their emphasis on power, institutional relations, and self-formation. Emphasizing a sharpness of the differences between the two kinds of study as though they mark two basically diverging types of interpretation, in my opinion, is not helpful in its oversimplification. Foucault speaks, for example, of *Madness and Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, and *The Birth of the Clinic* as developing "axes" that are definitive of his genealogical project, and one cannot read those works well without noticing in addition to the importance of systematic structures the importance of issues of power in connection with rationality and truth, institutional formation of individuals (subjectivities), and the connections of expertise and social and governmental privilege (Foucault, 1997, 262; 2000).² A great deal of refinement and expansion of his thought takes place from the time of those works to his death in 1984, but we can say retrospectively that from the early 1960s Foucault's genealogical project of tracing lineages of knowledge and practice inclusive of archeology took form and direction. I will thus use "genealogy" to refer to the full scope of the writings we will consider.

Foucault's work was always experimental and in process; change, reconsideration, and recoiling back to move ahead—something like a process of continuously recreating himself and his work—are signature characteristics of his genealogical project.

Before I turn directly to Foucault's genealogy, I would like to note his ambiguous relation to professional philosophy "as it is practiced and taught in France"³ and in relation to which he describes his work as coming from the outside (Foucault, 2006, 575). This is exterior to an approach to philosophical, canonized works that many philosophers interpret as foundations for other kinds of knowledge, an outside vis-à-vis a self-totalizing tradition with a "profound" interior that turns people away from the complex surface of events and toward its own logics, principles, and history. Only by freeing himself from a disposition toward universal criticism of all knowledge, from moral injunctions whose authority originates in the Western philosophical canon, and from unceasing commentary on philosophical texts can he develop the discipline he seeks: The analysis of events (Foucault, 2006, 577). Turning away from the dominant French, philosophical approaches and beliefs, in other words, are necessary for him to cultivate a professional identity and body of work that focus on "conditions and rules for the formation of knowledge to which philosophical discourse is subject, in any given period, in the same manner as any other form of discourse with rational pretension" (Foucault, 2006, 578). The phrase, "in any given period," points to Foucault's understanding of events that are definitive in a society for limited periods of time:

What I tried to show in the history of madness and elsewhere is that the systematicity which links together forms of discourse, concepts, institutions, and practices is not of the order of a forgotten radical thought that has been covered over and hidden from itself [T]hat is to say that I set out to study and analyze the "events" that come about in the order of knowledge, and which cannot be reduced either to the general law of some kind of "progress", or the repetition of an origin For me, the most essential part of the work was in the analysis of those events, these bodies of knowledge, and those systematic forms that line discourses, institutions, and practices (Foucault, 2006, 578)

I will have more to say about Foucault's meaning for "event." For now, I want to register that he needed to move outside of canonized philosophical terminology and methods in order to develop a different kind of knowledge and thought and to give accounts of what he found. As he said, "... I don't think that an intellectual can raise real questions concerning the society in which he lives, based on nothing more than his textual, academic scholarly research." (Foucault, 2000, 285)⁴

Foucault was one of those philosophically trained people who saw before many of us did that if we want to speak of many things that happen in the world and speak of them in ways that turn us toward those things' singularities and uniquenesses, we will need a revised vocabulary and manner of

reflection in comparison to that traditionally called logical, wise, and good. Genealogical thought is at times difficult because it is counterintuitive to canonized good sense. It can also occasion events of rare pleasure when we experience some things as though for the first time and find in that process transformations of senses, feelings, and commitments and transformations that move us toward new experiences of truth, power, and agency.

II. GENEALOGICAL ETHOS

A genealogical attitude that is attuned to Foucault's work thus includes a significant amount of departure from some of Western philosophy's most entrenched habits of mind and operating beliefs. I will not be able in this discussion to establish with strong evidence what those habits of mind and beliefs are, so I will mention only a few of the predispositions that I have experienced and that I believe join with major aspects of Western reflective lineages. I begin this way for two reasons. First, Foucault's genealogical thinking includes major confrontations with many established and authoritative values and truths. If people are prereflectively inclined to organize what they experience by those values and truths, they very likely will not see or will refuse options to those organizations and their meanings. Genealogical thought maximizes the production of new options for knowing, affirming, and critiquing and thus requires alertness to values—the valences, the organizing forces—that operate powerfully in the ways we recognize, structure, and connect with ourselves, other people, and things.⁵ Our knowledge, rationality, and morality are saturated with dynamic trajectories, hierarchies of importance, and aversions. A measure of critical alertness to some of these prereflective factors can enlarge our range for option and explanation, especially when we see that many axioms of true knowledge and morality are formed in complex lineages with the play of many interests and conflicts. So I would like to present three instances of predisposition that I experience in my mental and institutional environments with the hope that they might resonate with some of your experiences and with the further hope that you might be willing to join me in putting them in check for a while.⁶

Second, I begin with experiences of predisposition because in this essay on genealogy I want to emphasize the ethical import of Foucault's work. This aspect comes to its most explicit expression during the few years before he died at 57 in 1984. By "ethics" Foucault means a self's work on itself, the way it makes itself a moral agent as it finds the kind of relation it ought to have with itself, a "rapport a soi, which I call ethics and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault, 1997, 263). We can also understand as ethical an effort to know with critical reflection some of the genealogical factors that give sense and force in knowledge and practice. Such knowledge would be a reflective

step by which we begin a process of determining the way we do relate and the way we would like to relate to ourselves—in this case, coming to know ourselves by means of reflection on determinations to which we might or might not want to find options. The main point of this second reason is that genealogical self-awareness is at best an ethical undertaking in which the questions of who we are and who we would like to be interrupt some kinds of regularizing control that discourage individual autonomy. To paraphrase Foucault, it is not bad when we do not develop this kind of knowledge, but it is certainly dangerous (Foucault, 1997, 256).⁷ I will discuss the question of ethics in Foucault's work in the penultimate section. For now I want to indicate that our inquiry has an intended ethical import from beginning to end inclusive of paying attention to prereflective and value-laden dispositions.

As I understand them, the three predispositions that I note below do not have their origin in my consciousness or anyone else's. Their home is in discursive and practical functions that inform what I know, feel, and do.

1. I am usually inclined before I think about it to give a high value to unity and to wholes that define harmoniously their parts: A whole person who has integrated herself into a unified personality, a universe that constitutes a space of regulated interconnecting parts, a unified government. Unity and accord are usually associated positively. A final "one" is usually better than a final "two" or more. An intensity of sameness should pervade groupings of differences. Unity and continuity go together appropriately as do unity, truth, and purpose.
2. I am inclined to believe that truth is good and that what is good is in some sense true. The high, positive values attributed to "truth" and "good" are easily assumed. Who would want, short of severe mistreatment, to be thoroughly false and bad?
3. There is some kind of reward structure that operates in spiritual matters. A small example: A friend of mine said that although she did not believe in heaven or hell, she felt sure that she would go to hell because of that belief. She was not kidding. You might attribute her feelings to her particular Catholic upbringing, but there is another vaguely related kind of feeling that I experience outside the effects of explicit religious education. I find myself inclined to feel when I do not think about it that there is something in the way things are that holds me accountable for the good and bad things I do. It is an amorphous feeling that moral interest could well be intrinsic to the way things happen.

You can probably pick out other predispositions that operate inchoately in your lives. My point now is that as we engage genealogical thought, many deeply ingrained inclinations might well come to feel problematic and optional. The ways we connect with such dispositions in our engagement with genealogical knowledge and the ways this knowledge confronts them are ethical issues in which relations to ourselves and our environments are in question.

We thus turn to a discussion of genealogy knowing that it will violate instances of professional, philosophical good sense as well as some powerful cultural predispositions, and with the additional notation that violation, critique, and alertness to the dangers of our values and established knowledge

are part of a genealogical ethos, a way of life in this discourse, that has its own kind of moral implication.

III. THE QUESTION OF "HOW"

"The problem is: how do things happen?" (Foucault, 1980, 50). "How?" and not "what are these things?" Prioritizing the "how" is a phenomenological trademark and signals its turn away from traditional preoccupations with substantial identity and nonphenomenal reality. In the language of the phenomenological tradition, the priority of the how initiates a manner of thinking that sets itself apart from traditional theorizing and many metaphysical ways of thinking about objects. The genealogists who are focused on how things happen would not usually call their work theoretical (Foucault, 2000, 240).⁸ Although they are very interested in the ways things are formulated into objects and types of identities, they understand their work to address how something comes to appear as it does. They do not ask what something "essentially" is.

I am tempted to say that genealogists pay attention to the ways things show themselves, but that would make Foucault more phenomenological than he is. In fact, he dissociated himself from what he called phenomenological dogmatism. Things do not show themselves so much as they are presented as ... in systems of recognition, analysis, regulation, and control. Patients in the eighteenth-century *Hopitaux Generaux*, for example, were different kinds of subjects and objects in comparison to patients in the *Salpetriere Hospital* where Foucault died. A genealogist would want to know how they appear in their distance and difference within the systems and discourses that display and define them. To find that out, instead of going "to the things themselves," Foucault would find the records, rules, and notes—all the available archival material from and about the hospital (or prison or disciplinary method) in a particular period of time. He would be interested in the governmental and social structures that operated on and through the particular hospital's manner of confinement and the spatial distributions that defined its enclosures. How was "care" delivered? How were the sick classified and distributed? Who was excluded? The genealogist with more or less emphasis on structures, more or less attention paid to the dynamics and techniques of various kinds of power or self-formation, and always alert to the forms of governance and operative canons of good sense—the rationality—that moved through the disciplines and dominant institutions and provided the definitions and statuses of things and truths: Foucault would find out how groups of things happened as they did, how they were, what or who they were, and how the heterogeneous layers of structures and distributions of power come to be configured as they were.

When the question how gains priority for thinking and reflective perception, an interesting and in my estimation important change occurs. People are liberated from essences in the sense that they expect to experience changeable and

optional things without the manifestations of largely unchangeable natures; they find complex figurations of axiomatic values and meanings that are definitive within highly fluid spaces and times. In his statement that I quoted in footnote 7 Foucault says that his activism is both hyper and pessimistic—pessimistic because there are so many serious and dangerous social/political problems that compound each other and operate with persistent force in structural formations and circulations of power and because all alterations of bad situations will themselves have multiple dangers and problems. But hyper-activist in part because he knows that all systems of knowledge, meaning, and practice are changeable and that “essences” are mutable and metastatic: Situations that people experience as intolerable or bad or highly problematic can be changed. Fatalism has no draw for him. He wants, rather, to make apparent a wide variety of dangers in established knowledge and practice and to make evident as well the multiple problems they occasion on their own terms, the ways, for example, correctional institutions tend to accomplish the opposite of their stated goals or the ways systems of subjugation produce the intensity and agencies that will transform them or take them over. It is not because people have timeless natural rights that he takes action in various causes. Foucault’s commitments arise in part because he knows that individuals could live different kinds of lives from those they live and societies can change. Such commitment is not inevitable and surely has a fragile basis, which I will discuss in the next to last section. But in the force of his and our primary lineages in Western culture, his kind of active commitment makes sense even when the basis for it has lost its metaphysical and theological foundations.

IV. CONFLICTING DIFFERENCES

Genealogy gives accounts of all manner of things—asylums, clinics, structures of perception, scientific procedures, discourses, prisons, and moralities—and in the process finds unhelpful the ideas and imagery of simple identity. Like Hegel, before him, Foucault found that contradictory differences are usually definitive of what is recognized or conceived as one thing, but contrary to Hegel he did not find evidence of an implacable dialectical logic at work or a self-realizing *Geist*. He found, rather, regional systems of mutable necessities that define truths and people’s connections to them, the formations of common types of subjectivity, normative values, etc. The genealogies of such sustaining realities are rife with mutations, terrible conflicts, pieces of previous systems, and a *mélange* of interconnecting practices—genealogists find galaxies of accidents, connections, and coexisting contradictions that shine out of their investigation. The genealogical intention is to find and follow descents that form what are often taken as stable—sometimes even immobile—realities, like, for example, the seemingly stable a priori structures of reason, universal human nature, or primal and purposive origins for finite processes. Genealogical knowledge is attuned to compound

networks of factors that define groups of people, forms of relation, and recognition. In this orientation, conflicts of differences that are intrinsic to the fabric and dynamics of identities indicate the effective reality of the identities, not a regrettable lack of being. These self-repeating networks of diverse forces usually happen—eventuate—in their diverse makeup with grades of intensity, that is with organizing centers and less forceful margins that tend both to pull away and to move toward the more compelling intensity.

The signal importance of conflicting differences in the descriptive work of genealogy has as three of its effects: (1) suspension of well intended images of harmony and progress; (2) expectation of continuous tendencies in all manner of orders toward divergence and transformation; and (3) expectation that marginalization occurs as structures of regulation and enforcement operate. An indirect effect of this way of thinking is encouragement of those kinds of character that can affirm what seems positively valuable without the aid of totalizing hopes and images. I believe that accounts of the qualities that enable people to experience values positively without metaphysical support would constitute a significant ethical contribution in the genealogical tradition. On Foucault's terms that kind of work would be aided by a study of problems that have led people to cultivate disciplines of thought and action without justification beyond the effects they occasion. Very likely some of those initiating problems have arisen due to a variety of systems of justification that classified and divided people in ways that were self-defeating or that empowered resistance either within or outside the society.

V. COUNTER-MEMORY

The “counter” of this term refers to forces that have shaped many of the accepted narratives in our Western culture and that contain what Foucault called in 1971 an “endlessly repeated play of dominations” (Foucault, 1977, 150).⁹ One of the primary goals of genealogy is to develop careful knowledge that is not under the jurisdiction of the forces and powers that shape various modern disciplines (Foucault calls them sciences). How can people do that? By paying attention to the margins and fringes of those disciplines, to those who are silenced by the authoritative systems and people, such as the insane, imprisoned, or, in the eighteenth century, those who were poor and sick; by analyzing what is oppressed or restrained by categorizations in normative literature, for example, in some situations, illiterate women, children, and certain kinds of insights and experiences that deviate from what is “normal.” Or, as in the case of *The Order of Things*, Foucault turned to orders of epistemic and canonized truths to find their common forms and codes of organization as well as to find their remarkable transformations and the discontinuities and mutations that ran through their continuity and seeming immobility. He is thus developing, in comparison to Western, traditional knowledge, a different historical knowledge and discipline and producing a

different memory and narrative. The key to the difference is found in the orders of the knowledge he produces, their countering the orders he analyzes, the different intellectual ethos they require, and the transitional feelings, dispositions, and attitudes that characterize them. Counter-memory is no more abstract than any memory that lives in texts and practices or that a person individually undergoes. Memories are forceful in all types of situations, and with individuals they are in the events that move them—events that people live as they participate in cultural and social events. Those events, like institutions and languages, are mooded and dispositional. Many disciplines of knowledge are principled ways of remembering and not only remembering when and how events happened but also holding in memory as well the values of certain kinds of truth, method, and order. When those values are themselves remembered differently and in terms, say, of previously unnoticed dangers and constituent parts, the structure of the canon with its dominations, silent intentions, and limitations begins to shake due to the force of a different narrative and disclosure. To change the ordered way something happens in memory and to produce a different memory has transformative impact on feelings as well as on structures of recognition. Memorial change alters relationships and values in the very process of seeing something differently from the way one usually saw it. When I come to recognize a way of knowing, for example, as thoroughly invested with power, I might experience more tentativeness than previously in its regard and will probably raise questions that would have seemed abstract or senseless. Counter-memory changes the ethos of knowing. It qualifies the ordering power of memorial narratives and the knowledge and practice that are influenced by the narratives.

VI. EVENTS OF HETEROGENOUS LAYERS

Foucault's descriptive claim is that cultural things happen with multiple layers of structures and relations of force: "A profusion of entangled events" is a phrase he used to characterize an environment (Foucault, 1977, 155). Never like a straight line, the descents of an institution or a formation of knowledge have more formative tributaries flowing into them and mutations conditioning them than any account could describe or recognize (Foucault, 1980, 194).¹⁰ The point now is that institutions and discourses happen as complex events with multiple strata and trajectories as well as with discontinuities of differences running through them. Identity is determined by confederations of factors that organize practices, words, or symbols. There seems to be always tensions among conflicting elements: In other words, change is always possible from within systems of connections as new factors come in play or conflicting elements gain new leverage when circumstances change. New factors could include, for example, urgent problems that the structure cannot

resolve, the emergence of new technology or knowledge, or the increased importance of a previously less significant element.

The elements of a discourse or institution happen together as they form nonharmonious, organized events that constitute their own space of occurrence. Historical events happen with multiple affects and reverberations in contexts of other events, not like an orderly condition for the possibility of knowledge but as a profusion, an “entangled web of differential impacts” (Foucault, 1977, 155). It is a matter of the way surfaces are formed and moved, of specific hierarchies, and always of events that are heterogeneously layered and filled with dynamic, multiple trajectories, and dysfunctional gaps.

“History,” says Foucault in the context of discussing Nietzsche, “becomes ‘effective’ to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being Effective history deprives the self of reassuring stability of life and nature It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity” (Foucault, 1977, 154). It is one thing to say that uneducated people or those who are outside of the specialized knowledge of a discipline often experience upheaval in their basic assumptions due to the impact of a body of knowledge. It is quite another to say that effective history—genealogy, for example—functions as an impacting force in established disciplines and practices that reverses relationships of other forces, usurps power, and turns vocabularies against those who used them for now challenged dominations (Foucault, 1977, 154).¹¹ Effective history, like other effective historical events that are far from a rationally constrained structure, works on multiple layers of social and political life, shifting the environment and making trouble for other orders. Effective history is “a curative science,” a discipline that relieves people from persistent orders of high cost stability and reintroduces the “justice” of a world that exceeds good sense and established truth. Foucault’s intention, early and late, was to modify the subject who knows and the known object by means of his genealogical work. To carry out his objective, he needed to do original research on many different factors that constituted his subject matter. In *Madness and Civilization*, for example, in order to understand the emergence of a new experience of madness and a new discipline to treat it, he followed the beginning “of a certain normalizing society, connected with practices of confinement, with a specific economic and social context corresponding to the period of urbanization, the birth of capitalism, with the existence of a floating, scattered population, which the new requirements of the economy and the state were unable to tolerate” (Foucault, 2000, 255). One point is that events that shape who we are, what we know, and the structures that govern the establishment of truth—these events are multilayered and do not fit neatly into one traditional discipline. A second point is that a different way of knowing and thinking is called for. A third point is that Foucault is right: If our objective is to know how things are going on in the world, armchair philosophy is

unsuited for our goal. And a fourth point: If we are going to do effective ethical studies, we will need to do more than clarify terms and other philosophical texts. We will need to find effective ways to interrupt dominant rationalities, effective ways to show the wide range of impact by knowledge and practices in many dimensions of society, and to develop vocabularies and concepts that form in experiences of concrete, highly problematic situations.

VII. POWER/KNOWLEDGE

Foucault refined the language he used under Nietzsche's influence when he reflected on the inseparable intimacy of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980, 52).¹² In his genealogical investigation he paid attention to "fundamental structural changes" as societies formulated "mechanisms of power" in their "capillary forms of existence." He wanted to show the way that power, instead of coming as it were from on high, is structured to reach "into the very grain of individuals, [to touch] their bodies and [to insert] itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (Foucault, 1980, 39). Beginning in the eighteenth century, governments created regimes to exercise power "*within* the social body, rather than *from above* it" (Foucault, 1980, 39). Schools, moral education for workforces, reformatories, and hospitals were among the institutions that worked to normalize individuals into self-regulating subjects who followed the standards for health, propriety, and productivity. All manner of disciplines, from medical science to criminology, pedagogy, and theology, were enlisted to mold the bodies and minds of citizens in the direction of normal, constructive good sense. One of the most powerful means of the capillary systems of power was strict observation and immediate correction of errors according to the guidelines of experts and local officials. "Normalization" in this context refers to a way of life that is formed and led by institutions and disciplines with the authoritative power to mold the ways individuals relate to themselves and each other. The goal is to produce people who oversee themselves according to authoritative knowledge and prescriptions. "Power/Knowledge," in other words, names a configuration that is ethical to the core. The question is not whether the power element is regrettable. Rather, factors of power should be described—the specific functions of capillary powers and their effects need analysis, their descents described, and their characteristic problems, dangers, and intentions made clear: They need to be the subject of an inquiry that would comprise a subversive knowledge in relation to often unseen types of power that function in normalizing discourses and institutions, an inquiry that increases disclosure and deliberation but not necessarily condemnation. This knowledge would be strategic in the sense that, far from making global or speculative claims, it would provide reflective tools for making transparent the ways certain institutions and types of knowledge control and direct people's lives without their knowing enough

to care. Or it could support those who are actively resisting efforts to mold their subjectivities.¹³ Genealogical knowledge has the effect of giving occasions for people to play greater roles in forming themselves as subjects of judgment, pleasure, and action.

VIII. ETHICS AND GENEALOGY

In Foucault's analysis of the May 1968 uprising in France, he said that even though "things were coming apart" there did not "exist any vocabulary capable of expressing that process" (Foucault, 2000, 271). We could say on Foucault's terms that there did not exist a way of knowing (a subject of knowledge) and the language and concepts suited for the complex event of France's transformation. A momentous event happened without adequate "tools" for its recognition, analysis, and appropriation. Consequently, in the following dispersion of quarreling groups and political factions, the 1968 crisis did not at first become an effective discursive event that opened up a full range of apparent problems and transformations for formal knowledge. That would require a knowing subject that was turned away from the strongest discursive options, such as those of the current Humanists, Marxists, Maoists, French colonialists, and French cultural supremacists. So much was falling apart in France at the time that a subject of knowledge was needed that formed in the interconnecting French crises, a subject informed by marginal experiences in comparison to the experiences recognized by the dominant discourses, marginalized experiences like those of Algerian soldiers, French prisoners, people oppressed by French colonialism, people hammered down by Stalin's communism or the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, and people in highly energized, non-French cultures: a subject that developed with the voices and experiences that were on the margins of the older and authoritative French way of life.

In spite of the stammering and stumbling in its aftermath, however, May, 1968 opened an opportunity for a new "vocabulary," a new discourse, and a new ethos for recognizing and knowing. Its event made possible a transitional and transformative knowing subject whose relative freedom and lack of establishment constituted a major, constructive epistemic difference from the accepted discourses. Much more could be said on this issue, but my present, limited points are that in the context of Foucault's thought, transformation of the knowing subject constitutes an ethical event; and ethics on an individual level takes place as people work on themselves to be able to change themselves enough to know differently and to transform what is evident about others (Foucault, 2000, 241–2).¹⁴ These two kinds of transformation take place in genealogical knowing as Foucault conceives and practices it.

Two different senses for ethics are at work here. One sense refers to ways of life that are constituted by discourses, institutions, and practices—by all manner of power formations that are not authored by singular individuals

and that are ingrained in people's lives inclusive of their judgment, knowledge, and codes of behavior. A society, of course, can have a variety of overlapping or competing ways of life, a variety of ethical environments, and changes in these environments would compose ethical changes in this broad sense of "ethical." The knowledge that genealogy generates comprises a different discourse from many established ones and puts in question many aspects of Western society, especially around the topics of madness, sex, crime, normalcy, social/political suppression of people, and mechanisms of regulation and control. It challenges significant parts of our social environment, encourages deliberation and critique, and intends to make a differential impact on contemporary ways of life. In addition to his writing, Foucault was active in many causes designed to change political and social formations and to have a broad social impact. He played a leading role, for example, in support of Vietnamese boat people who were fleeing from persecution and being ignored by Western governments. He was active in prison reform movements. He spoke out against what he found to be unacceptable injustices in Poland and equally unacceptable silence in their regard in the West, against a *Realpolitik* that ignores suppression of people and their liberties in countries other than one's own. He showed in multiple ways that passionate support of institutional transformation and of suppressed and suffering people can be carried out without Humanism or other forms of universalizing or totalizing discourse.

A second sense of ethics for Foucault means a work on the self by the self.¹⁵ He understood, for example, his writing (and his interviews) as processes of self-formation: "I haven't written a single book that was not inspired, at least in part, by a direct personal experience," an experience that he wants to understand better by finding a different vocabulary, changed combinations of concepts, and the mutations they bring by connecting with aspects of experience that are barely emerging at the borders of his awareness (Foucault, 2000, 244). His books, he says, compose experiences inclusive of his own "metamorphosis" as he writes them and comes to a transformed connection with their topics. He would also like for his books to provide readers with something akin to his experience, to bring us to our limits of sense where transformations can occur (Foucault, 2000, 244). The sense of ethics in this case is focused by individual experiences and the care they exercise in connecting with them. In care for themselves, they work at maintaining or altering their behavior and attitudes to appropriate themselves to their experiences.¹⁶ Foucault says that his books are "like invitations and public gestures" to join in the book's process, a process that he finds transformative of aspects of contemporary life and potentially, should individuals join in, transformative of the way they understand and connect with themselves (Foucault, 2000, 245–6).

Care for self has a very long lineage that Foucault spent his last years investigating. Indeed, understanding himself without metaphysical help or

universalized solutions was one aspect of his caring self-relation. He carried out a project, deeply rooted in a Western tradition that makes caring for oneself inseparable from the ways one knows oneself, the world, and others. In his own process, he finds repeated instances of change in his self-world relation as he experiences the impact of what he is coming to know at the borders of his knowledge and identity. When these boundary-experiences (he calls them limit-experiences) occur, he says, the clarity of some aspects of his identity dies in the impact of what he is coming to find. His affections and behavior often change. As an author he attempts to write into his books these very processes for the reader's possible engagement.

If I find through one of his books, for example, a way of knowing that makes clear some of the dangers inherent in a well-established body of knowledge or a mainstream institution, I have an opportunity for assessing those dangers and choosing how I will connect with them and my experience of them. I might find that what I know and the way I know are violated by what Foucault's work shows. I might find his approach and the knowledge that it offers highly questionable or irrelevant for my life. I might experience new questions, a need for change, an unexpected dissatisfaction with what I have been accepting as true and good. If Foucault's works carry out their intention and if I read them carefully, I am engaged in an experience that he found transformative and that will make room for choices and problems that I can experience and that might bring me to an edge where what I know meets a limit and the possibility for an altered discourse and subjectivity. Coming in this way to an edge, a limit of the way I know and who I am in such knowing brings together the epistemic and personal aspects of ethical experience. The very act of caring for myself in this instance interrupts the subliminal processes of normalization and sets in motion another kind of dynamics as I come to the limits of my "authorized" experience and the emergence of a different kind of experience. I am caring for myself, impacting my own affections, values, and way of knowing. The dynamics of what Foucault calls biopower (the powerful complex of social forces that regulate human behavior by means of, for example, health care delivery, education, and moral legislation in both broad and "corpuscular" ways) are interrupted by a different dynamics that builds individual autonomy. Self-caring instead of the anonymous dynamics of normalization begins to form my self's relation to itself. How will I appropriate the experience of limits and their transgression by emerging "voices", realities, and intensities? Who shall I be in their impact? How will I present myself to myself and my environment should I affirm what is happening in the margins of my established identity?

Meeting such limits, in Foucault's language, constitutes experiences of freedom in which transformative opportunities present themselves. There are no experiences for him more important than those of freedom at the limits of reason and identity, and he is speaking from and to these experiences

in each of his books. I believe that he found in experiences of freedom the rarest of opportunities and pleasures—not obligations, but privileges to share them by giving voice to the struggle, decisions, and knowledge that come out of his encounter with the limits of what he previously knew and who he previously was. I think that is why, early and late, he never found good reason to, in effect, deny freedom as he experienced it by giving a high value to systematic consistency among his books. His care of himself did not figure a new rationality. It figured discoveries of the limits of his and other rationalities—it figured care for rationalities by valuing their freedom: their ability to transform and become different. We can appreciate Foucault's refusal to universalize these experiences and in this way to remain consistent with the value of freedom that forms—to use a phrase similar to his own—a vacant core in his thought and in his connection to himself and to us.

IX. GENEALOGICAL ETHICS AND BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

Although the primary purpose of this paper is to provide an account of Foucault's genealogical thought in connection with its understanding of ethics, I will conclude by noting four topics, among many possibilities, that could be raised in biomedical ethical work that is influenced by Foucault's thought. The issues themselves are not necessarily new to the discipline of biomedical ethics, but Foucault's approach might shift the way they are often recognized and help to provide an optional angle of vision and intention.

1. Moral virtues and judgment are insufficient to define the scope of biomedical ethics. The priority turns from moral practices to questions of politicizing people's lives and of who is best served by particular axiomatic values, authoritative knowledge, and professional practices. What interests, for example, are at work in the formations of biomedical ethical knowledge? How dependent is a particular work in biomedical ethics on: (a) normative medical practices and policies in leading health care institutions; (b) the values of governmental and private granting agencies; (c) a particular, canonized philosophical tradition? These questions do not suggest that such dependencies are bad. These are questions, rather, about the ways dependencies work, the influences that constitute them, and the effects of those influences. Are some of the approaches and operating values in biomedical ethics tributaries of normalizing, controlling power in the medical profession that serve well certain segments of the population while endangering or disadvantaging other segments?
2. All values and virtues are questionable. Consider the value of truth, for example. Are there significant limits to the value of truthfulness? Is truth primarily a matter of correspondence between states of affairs and statements about them? What lineages operate in the meaning and value of "truth" in biomedical ethical discourse? Does a particular approach to biomedical ethics in its understanding of truth have a vocabulary and conceptual structure sufficient to recognize and address subtle operations of institutional power and complexities in given moral

judgments and practices? Or does a particular understanding of truth tend to serve those operations and complexities?

3. Biomedical ethicists' care of themselves is an important issue for biomedical ethics. We have seen that Foucault emphasizes transformative experiences that often take place at the margins of "normalcy," good sense, and right thinking. In these experiences a knowing subject changes in the impact of previously unrecognized dimensions of events, social formations, and normative practices. These boundary-experiences enable a person to change, to grow, to know differently, to expand her experiential, evidentiary base of reference, and to gain a new perspective on the way things are known and done normatively. I had such experiences, for example, when I worked closely with terminally ill patients and their families, when I worked in a small Mexican village, and when I encountered disciplines of learning considerably different from my own. I expect that you too have found yourselves and your knowledge changed by events and experiences that took you beyond what you knew and believed. My points now are that such boundary-experiences constitute important opportunities for self-formation and for the transformations of knowledge and perspective and that we can be more or less disposed to their happening. People care for themselves as they respond to these transformative opportunities and in their impact confront themselves and the ways they know the world and other people in the process. For Foucault, self-care and self-transformation are closely allied in the impact of marginalized differences and continually mutating forms of certainty. In such events people come to terms with themselves in their contextualized freedom and in the complex mix of danger and opportunity that characterizes our normative values and knowledge.
4. The Practicality of Genealogical Ethics. What I have written in this paper is in so many ways distant from the immediacy of ethical issues in clinical practice. The dilemmas and concerns that arise in concrete situations of suffering and life/death, in specific care-giving encounters, in the sheer force of human need and desire that health professionals face daily: The requirements for interested, skilled engagement of medical professionals in a climate of ethical awareness and good will can make many of the issues in this paper seem abstract and disinterested. Nothing that Foucault or I have said can replace the importance of clinically informed, direct consideration of the best values for responsible medical practice. I have struggled with this awareness throughout the process of writing this paper. I continued its direction nonetheless because of the importance I give, in concert with Foucault, to the ordinarily invisible powers, closures, and limits in formations of widespread networks of practice and authoritative knowledge. How are we to break out of the bubble? Where do we find access to the people and possibilities that can generate different perspectives on our highest moral and professional values? How might we relate to ourselves so that we are predisposed positively to boundary-experiences? I believe we would do well to consider approaches to knowledge and power that put in question our professional knowledge and our self-knowledge, approaches that turn us to the limits of what we know and do with certainty. Foucault's genealogy, by pursuing lineages of knowledge construction and institutional power, provides an instance in which seemingly abstract and abstruse investigation carries enormous practical force when it is

pursued with disciplined care. Its engagement would likely provide a boundary experience for many of us, especially when we are so thoroughly engaged by the pressures and demands of everyday practice that we have neither time nor inclination to consider the silent constructions of power that form what we know to be our best virtues and most responsible knowledge.

NOTES

1. I will refer to this book as *Power*.
2. I will refer to this book as *Ethics*. See also *Power*: "In writing *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, I meant to do a genealogical history of knowledge. But the real guiding thread was this problem of power. Basically, I had been doing nothing except trying to retrace how a certain number of institutions, beginning to function on behalf of reason and normality, had brought their power to bear on groups of individuals, in terms of behavior, ways of being, acting, or speaking that were constituted as abnormality, madness, illness, and so on." (Foucault, 2000, 283).
3. This Reply was published in France in 1972. The remainder of this paragraph will paraphrase parts of the contents of it.
4. He continues: "On the contrary, one of the primary forms of collaboration with non-intellectuals consists in listening to their problems, in working with them to formulate those problems: What do mental patients say? What is life like in a psychiatric hospital? What is the work of a hospital orderly like?" (Foucault, 2000, 285).
5. I will use the term, genealogical thought, or simply genealogy, to refer explicitly to Foucault's thought. There are many ways to do genealogies, but I would like to economize by not using his name every time I use the term.
6. I could just as easily have written "spiritual environment." I am never sure what I communicate when I use "spiritual" because of the word's enormously rich and varied senses—because of its operative genealogy. "Mental" is not much better, but I will rely on your good will at this point and hope that you see that I have in mind all manner of occurrences that involve memory, reasons, opinions, feelings, perceptions, and will.
7. "My point 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. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger." (Foucault, 1997, 256).
8. Foucault in 1978: "I am an experimenter and not a theorist. I call a theorist someone who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way. That isn't my case. I am an experimenter in the sense that I write in order to change myself and in order not to think the same thing as before" (Foucault, 2000, 240). Foucault's understanding of his writing as a project in changing himself, we will see, makes writing on his terms an ethical undertaking.
9. He continues, "The domination of certain men over others lends to the differentiation of values; class domination generates the idea of liberty [Domination is] fixed through its history in rituals, in meticulous procedures that impose right and obligation. It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies." (Foucault, 1977, 150).
10. "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century" in *Power/Knowledge* shows, for example, some of the complexity of the eventuation of modern medicine. Such complexity requires according to Foucault analyses of small segments of such events and considerable care in making limited hypotheses about the larger context. This caution grew throughout the 1970s and until his death. In "The Confession of the Flesh" he speaks of the "apparatus of sexuality" as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid." (Foucault, 1980, 194).
11. This sentence paraphrases one in Foucault (1997, 154).
12. "Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise." "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces the effects of power." (Foucault, 1980, 52).

13. The dictum, everything is dangerous but that's not the same things as bad, should be applied here. Foucault is saying that all forms of control have dangers, but they are not necessarily bad.

14. "...experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no longer itself This is a project of desubjectivation [As an author] my problem is to construct myself and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed. Which means that at the end of a book we would establish new relationships with the subject at issue"(Foucault, 2000, 241–2).

15. Foucault distinguishes ethics from morality. The latter refers to prescriptions for behavior, reflection on them, and obedience to them. He seldom addressed directly moral issues and always refused to make pronouncements on what people should do. He restricted his work to genealogical investigations of epistemic, social/political, and institutional formations—"I always came up against the question of power," and that for him is not primarily a moral issue, although it is certainly an ethical one. "It's true that the problems I pose are always concerned with particular and limited questions My role is to raise questions in an effective and general way, to raise them with the greatest possible rigor, with the maximum complexity and difficulty so that a solution doesn't spring from the head of some reformist intellectual or suddenly appear in the head of a party's political bureau. The *problems* I try to pose—those tangled things that crime, madness, and sex are, and that concern everyday life—cannot easily be resolved It's a matter of working through things little by little, of introducing modifications that are able if not to find solutions, at least to change the given terms of the problem" (Foucault, 2000, 284, 385, 288). Emphasis added. For Foucault, it is always an issue of problems, never solutions.

16. Foucault reported frequently, for example, that his 2 years of contact and conversations with mental patients in Hospital Ste. Annes in Paris provided an important range of experiences that freed him from some of his limits and that he attempted to come to understand in *Madness and Civilization*. See Foucault (1997, 223–4).

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