

Nietzsche and Genealogy

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Truth and Truthfulness

Traditional theories of truth:

- ① Correspondence Theory (what makes a belief true is its correspondence to a state in the world)
- ② Coherence Theory (what makes a belief true is the coherence of the belief system of which it is a part)
- ③ Pragmatist Theory (truth is the end of inquiry; truth is satisfactory to believe)

You may be a realist or an anti-realist (Michael Dummett) about truth. Deflationists about truth think that there is no metaphysical substance in the truth predicate because the proposition X and the proposition “X is true” are equivalent.

Raymond Geuss: Nietzsche and Genealogy

If Nietzsche clearly attacks the correspondence view, shows no interest in coherence, and seems to present no clear alternative of his own invention, then he must tacitly hold some kind of reductivist or pragmatist view [according to Habermas]. The most fruitful way of taking Nietzsche seems to me to see him not as trying to propound his own variant theory of truth, but as formulating a new question "How and why does the will-to-truth come about?" (and claiming that this question is more interesting than, and doesn't presuppose an antecedent answer to Plato's question "What is truth?"). (8)

Truth and Truthfulness

It is difficult to keep the things that Nietzsche says about truth consistent. On the one hand, Williams lauds his attachment to the truth in so far as Nietzsche resists the cowardice of believing errors. On the other hand, Nietzsche is famously dismissive of objective and metaphysical truth.

Williams appears to be distinguishing between an attitude of **truthfulness**, which is willing to believe something that is not useful or happinessmaking; and **truth**, about whose origins there may be a genealogy.

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 167

We should not reinterpret the exceedingly derivative, late, rare, accidental, that we perceive only on the crust of the earth and make of it something essential, universal, and eternal.

Truth and Truthfulness

Key points about Nietzsche's attitude towards truth.

- “fundamental insight: there is no pre-established harmony between the furthering of truth and the well-being of humanity” (does Nietzsche’s view of truth square with his will to power monism?)
- “it is still a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests”
- “error is not blindness—error is cowardice”
- nothing is really identical, all identity is a fiction (17)
- “the antithesis of the apparent world and the true world is reduced to the antithesis world and nothing”

Michel Foucault: Histoire de la sexualité, page 113

C'est à la condition de masquer une part importante de lui-même que le pouvoir est tolérable. Sa réussite est en proportion de ce qu'il parvient à cacher de ses mécanismes. Le pouvoir serait-il accepté s'il était entièrement cynique? Le secret n'est pas pour lui de l'ordre de l'abus: il est indispensable à son fonctionnement.

Bernard Williams: Truth and Truthfulness, 28

A genealogy is a narrative that tries to explain a cultural phenomenon by describing a way in which it came about . . . Our ethical ideas are a complex deposit of many different traditions and social forces, and they have themselves been shaped by self-conscious representations of that history. However, the impact of these historical processes is to some extent concealed by the ways in which their product thinks of itself.

Michel Foucault: Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 142

However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is “something altogether different” behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secrets that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.

Genealogy III

In the context of Hume's account of moral responsibility, genealogy denotes the kind of explanation pointing to the origins of a social practice of which it is essential that they themselves are not used as reasons to follow the practice. The core of the practice is somehow constituted by a certain forgetfulness toward its history. The forgetfulness is at the root of lending the practice intrinsic rather than instrumental value: a value which becomes detached from the original usefulness of the practice; also a value which experiences a threat to its reflective stability, and possibly a breakdown, when its historical origins are uncovered.

Genealogy IV

Here are some examples for cultural phenomena (it may be very controversial whether these really are cultural phenomena!) that have been submitted to genealogies:

- ① truth (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ② justice (David Hume)
- ③ morality (Friedrich Nietzsche)
- ④ gender (Judith Butler)
- ⑤ knowledge (Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge)
- ⑥ love (the prairie vole)
- ⑦ soul (Michel Foucault, The Body of the Condemned)

Prairie Voles and Montane Voles

- Prairie voles mate for life, and montane voles do not.
- Among prairie voles, the males not only share parenting duties, they will even lick and nurture pups that aren't their own.
- By contrast, male montane voles do not actively parent even their own offspring.

What accounts for the difference? Researchers have found that the prairie voles have greater numbers of oxytocin receptors in certain regions of the brain. Prairie voles that have had their oxytocin receptors blocked will not pair-bond. An object lesson in neuro-philosophy?

State of Nature Stories

State of nature stories operate on simplified, imaginary environments.

- justice (D. Hume)
- state (R. Nozick)
- knowledge (E.J. Craig)
- truth (B. Williams)
- morality? (F. Nietzsche)

The state of nature is not the pleistocene. What characterizes humans naturalistically is their massive potential for non-genetic learning.

Just-So Stories

In 1902, Rudyard Kipling published a book called *Just So Stories*. The term was appropriated in a derogatory fashion to discredit various types of evolutionary hypothesis about adaptation. The problem is usually that the hypothesis comes without means of empirical falsification.

	sons	daughters
general-status mother	2.8	1.7
low-status mother	2.3	2.6

Trivers-Willard hypothesis. Williams makes the point that just-so stories may be fact-defective, but that doesn't automatically make them law-defective.

Function and Explanation

A property (such as altruism or other collaborative dispositions) may function to make individuals and the societies in which they live more fit. Williams correctly points out that functional accounts are not explanations. They lack historical plausibility since rational deliberation about the value of a property in the development of this property would beg the question. The prisoner dilemma illustrates this problem formally.

One way in which evolutionary psychology may overcome this problem is by introducing intrinsic (versus instrumental) goals. A parent does not come to the aid of a child because the well-being of the child is of instrumental value (in order to promote the gene propagation of near kin); the well-being of the child is of intrinsic value. This leads to a genealogy, which may either be vindictory (Nozick: state) or non-vindictory (Nietzsche: morality).

Truth and Truthfulness

Williams' genealogy of truthfulness turns out to be vindictory, and it entails that correspondence to facts is of intrinsic value.

truth metaphysical, not historical

sincerity historical, instrumental

truthfulness historical, intrinsic

Salvator Mundi: Pedigree or Genealogy



Salvator Mundi: Pedigree or Genealogy

- ① Louis XII of France (around 1500)
- ② Henrietta Maria (wife of Charles I of England, around 1625)
- ③ John Stone (1651, for perhaps as little as 30 pounds)
- ④ returned to Charles II of England (English Restoration, 1660)
- ⑤ ... (third wives, illegitimate children, etc.) ...
- ⑥ George III (1763)
- ⑦ ... painting disappears ...
- ⑧ Francis Cook (1900)
- ⑨ sold for 45 pounds in 1958, painting disappears again
- ⑩ Robert Simon purchases the painting for \$10,000 in 2005 at an auction in New Orleans
- ⑪ Swiss dealer Yves Bouvier purchases the painting for \$75,000,000 in 2013
- ⑫ Dmitry Rybolovlev immediately purchases the painting for \$127,500,000
- ⑬ Mohammed bin Salman purchases the painting for \$450,312,500 in 2017

Pedigree and Genealogy

These are characteristic features of a pedigree, to be contrasted with a genealogy according to Raymond Geuss.

- positive valorization
- linearity
- singular origin

Genealogy of Christianity

As opposed to a pedigree of Christianity, in a genealogy of Christianity there

- are diverse lines of development (a synthesis)
- is a migration of concepts (the debtor-creditor relationship)
- is a history “doused in blood” (i.e. violent and oppressive)
- are contingencies (breaks, leaps, and coercions, GM II, 17)
- are individuals (Paul) and collectives (the Church, the mendicants) who impress their interpretation on a tradition (Foucault makes collective wills more precise with his theory of microdominations)
- self-contradictions that lead to eventual demise (compare Marx' dialectical materialism)

Beware of Avant-Gard Dog



Structuralism Table

	Pre-Structuralism	Structuralism	Post-Structuralism
unit of meaning	word	sentence	text/discourse
"it is raining outside"	stating the fact	stating the fact in contrast to other facts	starting point for a multiplicity of perhaps incoherent facts
meaning	content	form	self-reference
semiotics	design	difference	sign
truth	correspondence	coherence	multiplicity
hermeneutics	trust	comparison	suspicion
grammar	semantics	syntax	polysemy
explanation	construction	reduction	deconstruction
authorship	intent	system	death
location	centre	structure	decentring

These are the errors that, with Nietzsche's help, Foucault identifies about Paul Rée's historical explanation of morality:

- linear development
- exclusive concern for utility (Mill's utility monism)
- semiotic stability (words, desires, ideas keep their meaning/direction/logic)

Paul Rée "ignored the fact that the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys" (139).

Genealogy

- demands relentless erudition
- rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies (140)

Pursuit of the origin (Ursprung)

- attempts to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities (142)
- assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession
- is a search for primordial truth

"Liberty is an 'invention of the ruling classes' and fundamental to man's nature or at the root of his attachment to being and truth" (142). Disparity is at the historical origin. Foucault on narrative coherence:

Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of colour are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events. (145f)

Microdominations

In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” Foucault calls it the “endlessly repeated play of dominations.” It

- leads to the differentiation of values
- leads to the idea of liberty (macrodominations on a class level)
- established marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies (the “inscription on a body,” see Kafka’s “Penal Colony”)

The Role of the Law

The law is not opposed to violence (contra Hobbes), but the law is a “calculated and relentless pleasure, delight in the promised blood” (151).

The desire for peace, the serenity of compromise, and the tacit acceptance of the law, far from representing a major moral conversion or a utilitarian calculation that gave rise to the law, are but its result and, in point of fact, its perversion: “guilt, conscience, and duty had their threshold of emergence in the right to secure obligations; and their inception, like that of any major event on earth, was saturated in blood.” Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination. (151)

Two Accounts of Interpretation

If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations.

Traditional vs. Effective History

traditional	effective
historical constants	no historical constants
consoling play of recognitions	multiplying the body
rediscovery	discontinuity
knowledge made for cutting	knowledge made for cutting
find regulative mechanisms	find most unique characteristics
primordial intention	singular randomness
essential traits and final meanings	profusion of entangled events
kinship to philosophy	kinship to medicine
objectivity	perspective

Three Platonic Modalities

Effective history frees the historical sense from the demands of a suprahistorical history.

parody	vs.	reality
dissociation	vs.	identity
sacrifice	vs.	truth

Foucault and Authenticity

He will not be too serious to enjoy it; on the contrary, he will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing . . . taking up these masks, revitalizing the buffoonery of history, we adopt an identity whose unreality surpasses that of God, who started the charade. (161)

Antiquarian history “seeks the continuities of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted, and, ‘by cultivating in a delicate manner that which existed for all time, it tries to conserve for posterity the conditions under which we were born’” (162).

Hermeneutics of Trust

For Gadamer, a hermeneutics of suspicion is always derivative of a hermeneutics of trust (the contrast between the two is due to Paul Ricoeur, who wrote about this after Gadamer published *Truth and Method*). Gadamer says, “only when this assumption proves mistaken [the assumption that the text has integrity]—i.e. the text is not intelligible—do we begin to suspect the text” (294). Understanding is like speaking your native language: it is natural, constitutive of being. Misunderstanding is derivative and artificial, such as when someone speaks to you in a foreign language that you do not understand.

It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to “understand” the text, psychologically or historically, as another’s opinion (294)

Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutics of Trust/Suspicion

Hermeneutics of the sacred (Bultmann, Gadamer), where demythologizing is not meant to discredit symbols, but to recover original meaning. Hermeneutics of suspicion, which is not concerned with recovering the object, but with tearing away masks, with disclosing disguises, with revealing false consciousness.

- Nietzsche: narrative is the masking of will-to-power
- Marx: see Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony
- Freud: narratives are often misleading signals of a rich subconscious life (amnesia of ontogenesis)

Foucault: Two Kinds of Suspicion

Michel Foucault starts out his paper “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” with two kinds of suspicion towards language:

hyponoia language does not say what it means

semainon there are many other things in the world that speak
and that are not language

Stages of Interpretation

- ① Corpus of resemblance. Something wants to be said and can be deciphered. Deucalion and Pyrrha.

Pyrrha and Deucalion I



When Zeus decided to end the Bronze Age with the great deluge, Deucalion and his wife, Pyrrha, were the only survivors. Even though he was imprisoned, Prometheus who could see the future and had foreseen the coming of this flood told his son, Deucalion, to build an ark and, thus, they survived. During the flood, they landed on Mount Parnassus, the only place spared by the flood.

Pyrrha and Deucalion III

Once the deluge was over and the couple were on land again, Deucalion consulted an oracle of Themis about how to repopulate the earth. He was told to throw the bones of his mother behind his shoulder. Deucalion and Pyrrha understood the “mother” to be Gaia, the mother of all living things, and the “bones” to be rocks. They threw the rocks behind their shoulders, which soon began to lose their hardness and change form. Their mass grew greater, and the beginnings of human form emerged. The parts that were soft and moist became skin, the veins of the rock became people’s veins, and the hardest parts of the rocks became bones. The stones thrown by Pyrrha became women; those thrown by Deucalion became men.

Foucault: History of the Present

Four general rules:

- ① The concept under consideration fulfills a **complex social function**
- ② The concept under consideration is specific in the more general field of exercising power – it is a **political tactic**
- ③ the **technology of power** is the principle both of humanization and knowledge of man
- ④ the body invested with power relations **creates the soul**

The Penal System: A Historical Discontinuity

	executioner	vs.	army of technicians
	punishment of body	vs.	suspension of rights
individual (King and Condemned)		vs.	institution
	violence	vs.	bio-power
	theatre	vs.	order and silence (7)
	law and its subjects	vs.	norms and their subjects
	everyday perception	vs.	abstract consciousness (9)
	transcendental responsibility	vs.	responsibility relieved by bureaucratic concealment (9)
	body as immediate object	vs.	body as intermediate object
	punishing the body	vs.	curing the soul

Foucault: Bio-Power

- the industrial system requires cheap, efficient labour (25)
- it is always the body that is at issue – the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission (25)
- there is a knowledge of the body which is not a science of its functioning (26)
- this knowledge and this mastery constitute the political technology of the body (26)
- micro-physics of power (26)
- the irreducible entanglement of knowledge and power (27)
- subjugating human bodies by making them objects of knowledge (28) (see *Notes from the Underground*)

Subjectivity

- “the psychologists and the minor civil servants of moral orthopaedics” (10), “army of technicians” (11), “there swarms a whole series of subsidiary authorities” (21)
- economy of suspended rights
- the body as intermediary to the juridical subject
- the soul: “a new character came on the scene, masked” (16f, much more on page 29)
- substitution of objects: from crimes to passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, environmental and hereditary effects (when a child is punished, it is now for moral, not for practical reasons)
- the field of knowledge susceptible of scientific knowledge (the textification of the world, if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail)
- the “assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgment” (19)

Michel Foucault

... one may map ... through this displacement, a whole field of recent objects, a whole new system of truth and a mass of roles hitherto unknown in the exercise of criminal justice. A corpus of knowledge, techniques, scientific discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish. (23)

Marxism and Its Failure

The political investment of the body is bound up . . . with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination (26)

What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power . . . this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the privilege, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions . . . these relations are not localized in the relations between the state and its citizens or on the frontier between classes (27)

Knowledge

Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes people mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit, rather, that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

Knowledge

These “power-knowledge relations” are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system; but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge. (27f)

The Soul

- genealogy of the modern soul (29)
- the soul is not an illusion, “it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body”
- not born in sin and subject to punishment, but born out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint (the university precedes the student)
- on it are built scientific techniques and discourses, and the moral claims of humanism (30)
- the soul (which we long to be free) is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

The history of this micro-physics of the punitive power would be a genealogy or an element in a genealogy of the modern soul. Rather than seeing the soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

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

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

This is the historical reality of this soul, which, unlike the soul represented by Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject to punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. This real, non-corporeal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

On this reality-reference, various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.; on it have been built scientific techniques and discourses, and the moral claims of humanism. But let there be no misunderstanding: it is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection or technical intervention, has been substituted for the soul, the illusion of the theologians.

The Soul: An Extended Quote

Michel Foucault: The Body of the Condemned, 29f

The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. A soul inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.

Hermeneutics of Sex

Here are some ways in which Foucault informs a hermeneutics of sex.

- institutionalized knowledge and power bring sex within the purview of hermeneutics
- in line with anti-narrativism and the scientific tradition, the hegemony of hermeneutics is perceived as a threat
- Foucault, however, has no narrative-free alternative (bodies inconsequential bucolic pleasures?) to the deployment of discourse: interpretation (power/knowledge) creates subjectivity
- consequently, Habermas' concept of the ideal speech situation is illusory; there is no speech without power (concatenation of microdominations)

Transformation from Feudal to Bourgeois

- calling sex by its name more costly
- discursive explosion based on secrecy
- authorized vocabulary
- steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex (18)
- an institutional incitement to speak about it
- the Christian pastoral
- rules of self-examination
- the imperative and nearly infinite task to tell (authenticity)
- transforming desire into discourse (narrativization of sex)

- the author of *My Secret Life* and the halfwit of the Lorraine (where bucolic pleasures turn into judicial action, medical intervention, clinical examination, and theoretical elaboration, 31)
- “the strangest of these practices was the fact of recounting them all” (22, this wouldn’t be strange to a narrativist like Schechtman or Taylor, for whom the experience must be articulated before it can be meaningful)
- the convergence of morality and rationality (24, Freud and Pence)

- the emergence of population: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, diet, habitation
- schools: architectural layout—the question of sex was a constant preoccupation (27); the sex of the schoolboy became a public problem

Incitement to Discourse

Sex was driven out of hiding and constrained to lead a discursive existence. From the singular imperialism that compels everyone to transform their sexuality into a perpetual discourse, to the manifold mechanisms which, in the areas of economy, pedagogy, medicine, and justice, incite, extract, distribute, and institutionalize the sexual discourse, an immense verbosity is what our civilization has required and organized . . . we talk about sex more than anything else . . . we have never said enough on the subject . . . speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret

An Observation by Foucault, Introducing Butler

In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault writes

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances. (153)

The Possibilities of Inversion

Consider the following inversions.

Foucault It is not the subject that determines social power, but social power that determines the subject.

Butler Sexual identity does not follow from personal identity, but personal identity follows from sexual identity.

Rousseau The literal meaning does not precede the figurative meaning, but the figurative meaning precedes the literal meaning.

Derrida Writing, because it is supplemental, intermediate, distancing, characterized by transference, the sign of a sign, is not the worse, but the better representation of the function of language.

Features of the traditional view of identity:

- persisting through time
- as the same, unified, and internally coherent
- related to consciousness
- capacity for language and
- moral deliberation

Butler now asks:

To what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject? (23)

Butler Inversions

- personal identity ← gender identity
- becoming a person ← becoming gendered
- identity ← regulatory practices
- the descriptive ← the normative
- the doer ← the deed

Intelligible Gender vs Spectres

Intelligible genders are those which institute coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. They are met by the spectres (Marx, "A specter is haunting Europe" in the *Communist Manifesto*) of discontinuity and incoherence (23). They cannot 'exist,' because their practices of desire do not follow from either sex or gender. The matrix of intelligibility produces rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder.

The Matrix of Intelligibility

Identity is an effect of discursive practices (Habermas!).

- compulsory heterosexuality
- totalizing frame
- phallogocentrism (the precursor of compulsory heterosexuality)

Three Views on Gender

Luce Irigaray Irigaray is a Belgian philosopher who claims that there is only one sex, the masculine, which elaborates itself in and through the production of the Other.

Michel Foucault The category of sex, whether masculine or feminine, is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality.

Monique Wittig Wittig was a French philosopher who claims that the category of sex is always feminine because the masculine remains unmarked as the universal.

The Hermeneutics of Sex

Irigaray's theory of sexual preference suggests that women can never be understood on the model of a "subject" within the conventional representational systems of Western culture precisely because they constitute the fetish of representation and, hence, the unrepresentable as such. Women can never "be," according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which that domain marks itself off. Women are neither the subject nor its Other, but a difference from the economy of binary opposition, itself a ruse for a monologic elaboration of the masculine. (25)

The Hermeneutics of Sex

The grammar of gender masks the univocal and hegemonic discourse of the masculine, because being a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible (not if you are an essentialist). For Foucault, the binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies (26).

Metaphysics of Substance

The metaphysics of substance, a term associated with Nietzsche, shows that a number of philosophical ontologies have been trapped within certain illusions of “Being” and “Substance.” In no sense, however, do they reveal or represent some true order of things (28). Metaphysical substance is often derived from grammar, as in Descartes “I think therefore I am.”

Sexual Desire

The matrix of intelligibility is held together by asymmetries of sexual desire. There is another inversion here: sexual desire does not proceed from sexual identity, but it constitutes it. Sex is not the cause for the effects of sexual experience, behaviour, and desire; the cause-effect relationship is reversed (Foucault, 32). Foucault's antidote: Herculine Barbin, whose experience is "a world of pleasures in which grins hang about without the cat."

The Cheshire Cat



The Cheshire Cat

Smiles, happinesses, pleasures, and desires are figured here as qualities without an abiding substance to which they are said to adhere. As free-floating attributes, they suggest the possibility of a gendered experience that cannot be grasped through the substantializing and hierarchizing grammar of nouns and adjectives. Through his cursory reading of Herculine, Foucault proposes an ontology of accidental attributes that exposes the postulation of identity as a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction. (33)

Butler's Claim

Butler disagrees with Foucault. Gender is not a noun, but is also not a set of free-floating attributes. Gender is performatively produced; it is always a doing. The doer is merely a fiction added to the deed, as in Descartes-Nietzsche.

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[6542] What does Foucault identify as a problem with modern discourse about sex?

- A ► modernity is too body-focused (instead of mind-focused) in its sexuality
- B ► we talk about sexual desire too much (the endless mill of speech)
- C ► we don't talk about sex enough (repressed sexual desire must be articulated)
- D ► men want sex, women want conversation (gender imbalance with respect to verbal and sexual intimacy)

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[6039] What is the narrative eighty years after Damiens' execution to which the public execution is set in contrast?

- A ► the overcrowding of prisons
- B ► the abolition of the death penalty
- C ► a timetable of rules for young prisoners
- D ► institutional racism in prisons

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[7517] According to Foucault, modern discourse about sex is intimately linked to

- A ► the economic and political problem of population
- B ► the fear of sexually-transmitted disease
- C ► an erosion of monogamy due to homosexuality
- D ► the Christian dogma of the Trinity

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[8509] What, according to Foucault, is the relationship between knowledge and power?

- A ► knowledge and power have separate domains
- B ► power corrupts knowledge
- C ► power produces knowledge, power and knowledge imply one another
- D ► knowledge constrains power

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[9851] Who is Herculine Barbin (Foucault uses her to show that categories of sex are constructed through historically specific modes of sexuality)?

- A ► a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite
- B ► Foucault's mother
- C ► a woman who was condemned to death by hanging
- D ► a French postmodern philosopher

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[4473] Which three philosophers' views of sex does Butler describe in more detail?

- B ► Kant, Foucault, Derrida
- C ► Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche
- D ► Irigaray, Greer, Schwarzer
- A ► Irigaray, Foucault, Wittig

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[1511] Why did Charlie Musselwhite stop drinking himself to death?

- A ► because of a religious conversion experience
- B ► because he heard of a not-yet two-year old being saved from a well
- C ► because Aristotle appeared to him in a dream
- D ► because he was shipwrecked and had no access to alcohol

iClicker Question

Choose from the following options. This item will be graded.

iClicker Question

[6229] “The whole world is a work of art” – who is quoted saying this in Solnit?

- A ► Virginia Woolf
- B ► Jean-Paul Sartre
- C ► Andrew Warhol
- D ► Immanuel Kant