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Theory plays an important role in virtually every academic discipline currently vital. The specific functions of theory may differ from discipline to discipline, but it is difficult to think of any serious discipline that is able to dispense with it entirely; for theory, we usually assume, is quite simply the name of all instances of systematic speculation, all attempts at rational explication. Ordered mentation, most of us unwaveringly believe, is and must be theoretical. All that is not theoretical is either confused thinking— or, more positively, perhaps it is poetic—or it is not thinking at all, but rather a practice, object, or event. Thus the theoretical discloses itself to us as the essential nature of all our striving to make sense of ourselves and our world.

It is odd, then, that the word *theory* should be all but absent from the work of Michel Foucault. And yet absent it is, at every juncture where custom compels us to expect it to appear. When Foucault discourses at great length on knowledge, systems of knowledge, and various interpretations of what it is to know, we might expect him to offer us a new theory of knowledge, but he does not do that. Again, his detailed study of power (which appears in *La Volonté de savoir* and is referred to by many commentators as a theory) Foucault names not "theory" but "analytics";[1] and in an interview with Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, he insists that his ideas on power "represent neither a theory nor a methodology."[2] His accounts of the development of subjectivities likewise yield not a theory of the subject— although, again, some commentators have called it that—but rather an odd collection of ordered insights that Foucault prefers to call, á lá Nietzsche, genealogies.

In light of this, one might suppose that Foucault simply harbors an irrational dislike of *theory* as a word. One might suppose that his works, though theoretical in nature, simply do not choose to announce themselves that way. Thus, commentators have either overlooked or disregarded Foucault's avoidance of the word *theory*; and some have simply supplied it in their studies of his work. Consequently, analyses of Foucault's social theories, political theories, and theories of language abound.

However, instead of assuming that Foucault's work—systematic, speculative, and explicative as it is—is, regardless of his sometimes perhaps rather eccentric terminology, theoretical, let us suppose for the moment that Foucault's avoidance of the word *theory* is indicative of a rejection of theoretical thought, of a conscious, intentional, premeditated dethroning of the theoretical gaze. Let us, in other words, take Foucault's vocabulary seriously and address directly the question that theory's absence raises. Why not theory? In what sense is theory at odds with the aims of Michel Foucault? That is the question this paper purposes to answer.

There are several points of entry into Foucault's discourse. One way to begin to engage his work—the way that I have chosen to begin here—is to situate it in opposition to transcendentality. Foucault is interested in thinking the world thoroughly historically, without reference to any metaphysical structure, without recourse to any transhistorical constant. In particular, Foucault is interested in understanding human subjectivities, human selfhoods, historically, as the ever-changeable products of traceable sets of historical forces.[3] Foucault takes Nietzsche at his word when Nietzsche speaks in *Beyond Good and Evil* of the "I" that occurs within thinking and that in its arrogance then posits itself as the cause of the very matrix—thinking—from which it arises.[4] Foucault's explicit task is to understand the processes that formed and subsequently inform this self-proclaimed agency, this "I," the self-conscious individual, the subject of knowledge, action, and moral responsibility.

But early in the attempt a problem arises. The "I" that posits itself as the cause of thought also traditionally has posited itself as the source and owner of force, of power. Therefore, reversing the traditional priority of subjectivity and power—which Foucault must do if he is to understand subjectivities as occurrences within history—will require a reconceptualization of power, one in which power operates without essential reference to human agency. It is this reconceptualization that Foucault christens "analytics."

But why is analytics not a theory? The answer is fairly simple, though the reasoning behind it is somewhat more complex. We must remember that with Foucault we are in a discourse that rejects transcendentality and refuses to grant privilege to subjectivity. These stances, as we shall see, entail opposition to theory, for theoretical thinking is intimately associated both with privileged observation and with transcendental truth.

Theory's alliance with privileged observation has been duly noted and fretted over at least since the end of the nineteenth century. Various remedies have been proposed with varying degrees of acceptance and success, but these debates will not concern us here. What has been problematized

less often is theory's alliance with transcendental structure, the ahistoricity of its commitments and goals. We will examine this more carefully.

Theoretical work presupposes truth. One purpose, perhaps the main purpose, of theory is to render accessible—to capture in symbol, in language—the structure of the true. Whether the object in question is patterns of economic development, DNA replication, the sociology of warfare, or the creation of the world, theoretical discourse locates its target and attempts to seize it, to import it intact and alive into a linguistic structure that will display its complex order, its inner logic or form. To a very great extent, within theoretical discourse particular theories are measured against the reality that they purport to explicate. Theoretical discourses assume that there is a truth of DNA replication, that there is a truth of world creation. The theory that most adequately represents this truth is itself derivatively called true, or is at least tentatively treated as true until a "better" account presents itself. All other theories are held to be inferior to the one (or in some cases, the few) that most closely matches the reality with which it is concerned. The remaining untrue, or inferior, theories are usually discarded.[5] There is, then, so we are told, a kind of theoretic competition in which there are winners and losers, and, at the best of times—times unmarred by political maneuver or religious dogma—the judge in these games is truth, truth itself, the way things really are.

This is theoretical discourse's own account of itself. It understands itself to be a kind of game, albeit with a very serious purpose and very high stakes. If this self-portrait is accurate, then it would be reasonable to predict that theoretical discourse deprived of truth as both prize and judge would collapse into dramatic disarray. Without truth, theoretical thought would have no goal. It would be directionless or, what amounts to the same thing, multi-directional. Hence, competition among theories would be meaningless, for truth serves theory as its principle of valuational arrangement. In the absence of truth no theory could be disqualified from the field of play; no theory could be eliminated from consideration. Nor would any particular theory be able to command our assent. In theoretical discourse (to paraphrase Dostoevsky) without truth anything is possible. And the result is discursive chaos.

Before going on to link traditional conceptions of truth with ahistoricity, which is of course one of the objects of this paper, it is important to insert a slightly peripheral comment. There are those who contend that truth is not an essential element of theory for the simple reason that truth can never be attained. Our finitude hobbles us; truth is forever beyond our reach, and therefore it is external to theoretical discourse. Nevertheless, these thinkers would have us note that theoretical discourse is orderly, even

in truth's absence. Theory deprived of truth simply proceeds according to the principle of approximation. Though we remain always at an unbridgeable distance from our goal, each of our theoretical improvements yields a "closer" approximation to truth.

This alternative account of theoretical thought, it is important to see, does not really dispense with truth. Like its more optimistic counterpart, it posits a truth, but a truth that it then projects—here using that word in a quasi-psychological sense—outside the theoretical domain. Nevertheless, truth still functions as the internal ordering principle of theoretical discourse. Theory still structures itself with reference to some truth, despite its insistence that this truth is "out there" rather than within the discourse itself. Hence, this second account does not differ from the more commonly accepted account in its description of theoretical discourse's internal structure, the aspect of the discourse of concern to us here. Like the first account, it describes theoretical endeavors as contests or games that are dependent upon the *concept*, though perhaps not the acknowledged and tangible presence, of truth. Therefore, what we might call the Peircean account of theory really differs from the other account only in its degree of pessimism regarding the ultimate agonistic outcome.

By its own account, then, theory takes its meaning from its presupposition of truth. As a result, the degree to which theory is bound up with transcendental thought depends upon the degree of transcendentality that we assign to truth. The question we now must ask is whether truth transcends history, whether history simply flows past an undisturbed and undisturbable truth.

In the Platonic tradition the answer is, of course, affirmative. The true is Being, never Becoming. Truth does not change; it is perfect, and its stasis is the hallmark of its perfection.

It was the Greeks who gave us theory, the Greeks with their emphasis upon seeing—as opposed to hearing, touching, tasting, smelling—the Greeks and their love affair with wisdom, their mania for rational contemplation conceived as a kind of nonphysical beholding of the changeless world beyond this realm of dancing shadows and decaying apparitions. In the tradition we might somewhat loosely term Socratic or Platonic, theory is profoundly ahistorical, for the truth it seeks is always understood as timeless.

But, surely, truth has matured since then. Some theorists would insist that truth has broken its infantile ties with transcendence and has historicized itself. In what may be loosely termed the Hegelian tradition, the true is precisely the historical itself; it is identified with the changing world. Consequently, these thinkers would assure us, Foucault the historical thinker need not be wary of theory in this tradition. And if he is, he simply

has not been generous or thorough enough in his study of theory's transformations. He has failed to recognize theory in *its* historicity, in *its* changeableness. Foucault the self-proclaimed historical thinker has rejected theory only by overlooking its developmental nature in Hegelian thought. At this point, much to the delight of his critics, Foucault seems to be caught in a trap of his own making.

The accusation that Foucault is inconsistent on this point, however, is somewhat premature. For, upon closer examination, we see that it is not the case that theory in the Hegelian tradition breaks entirely with transcendence. It is not the case that Hegelian truth is subject to total change. Hegel does not after all leave Socrates so very far behind.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche locates the death of tragic art in the rise of Socratic cheerfulness, in the prevalence of the Socratic-Platonic conviction that everything ultimately is intelligible. For Socrates there is no positivity beyond the domain of intelligible arrangement. There is no Other, no Difference, nothing independent of the totalization of rationalistic order. It is above all this vision of absolute comprehension, of perfect and ultimately inviolable unity, that characterizes and undergirds the Socratic world.

Hegel does not challenge this vision. He simply renames it, identifies it, as a whole, with truth itself. The true now is, now means, that ultimately perfectly integrated whole, rather than simply the principles by which that whole orders itself. The true comprehends all change, all difference, all becoming. And all, *all*, is intelligible. Nothing effectively resists; nothing remains without. There is no chaos; there is no madness; there is no death. The true permanently excludes the very possibility of radical difference. Hence, the Hegelian comprehension of history is itself still beyond history, still partaking of transcendentality.

Theory, then, even within the Hegelian tradition, still orders itself according to an ahistorical truth. It still measures itself against a transcendental meter stick. Theoretical discourse still can be conceived as a competition in which transhistorical truth plays the part of both referee and goal.

With the thinking of history as his expressed purpose, Foucault cannot allow himself to slip into theoretical language; for to do so would be to risk the forgetfulness embedded in its terms and the arrogance inherent in its vision. The avoidance of theoretical terminology is, therefore, not simply a coincidence or the result of some semantic idiosyncrasy on Foucault's part. It is, on the contrary, an element in a very deliberate strategy aimed at the dismantling of transcendental thought.

Inevitably, a historical thinker runs headlong into truth. We may be able to let go of God, to historicize morality, to place the tenets of logic in

question, to situate the knowing subject, but truth may still remain un-
moved (its power directly proportionate to our inability to conceive of
thought without its guidance; its strength of command precisely equivalent
to our lack of imagination). As Nietzsche recognized, truth is the pillar of
the temple of ahistorical intelligibility.

The thinker who would think history must interrogate truth. We must
bring ourselves up short before the Nietzschean question: *"why not rather
untruth? and uncertainty? even ignorance?"*[6] Is it the case, after all, that
truth's position in our discourse, in our world, that truth's *value*, is inevi-
table? Are not other values, other systems of evaluation, equally imagin-
able, equally possible? It is the job of the historical thinker to articulate
that question, to remember it, to nurture it. For in no other way will
truth—will theory, will subjectivity or sexuality or power—ever be *trans-
valued*.

To undergo the question, "why not rather untruth?" is already to find
oneself, if only for a brief interval, outside the discourses in which tran-
scendental truth is an ordering principle. The transvaluational thinker must
find ways to expand that interval, to make it possible to hear the silence
beyond truth in its positivity, to allow the previously unthinkable to occur.
And, if possible, one must speak from truth's boundary, truth's discursive
limit, speak *of* that limit that theoretical discourse would deny. Foucault's
discourse must transgress the discourse of truth in such a way as to make its
transgressive movements audible, visible, *felt* within truth's own domain.

It is not overstatement to assert that every one of Foucault's works, the
very event of Foucaultian discourse, constitutes an attempt to trangress, and
thereby to transvalue, transhistorical truth. Historical thinking must occur
as a violation of the transhistorical. And, accordingly, Foucault must refuse
to employ any structure of articulation that cannot place in question the
value of truth.

Theoretical thinking constitutes one such deficient structure of articu-
lation. If Foucault were to think and speak theoretically, his discourse could
not bring into question the value of truth as ultimate standard or final goal.
If Foucault were to speak theoretically, he could not speak transgressively;
he could not speak transvaluatively. To cast Foucault in the role of the the-
orist is to strip his discourse of the power it claims and exercises. It is to
make nonsense of his entire enterprise. To understand Foucault's work as a
collection of theories—of the subject, of power, of knowledge—is not to
understand Foucault's work at all.

Serious attention to Foucault's work compels us to explore the possi-
bilities opened up by his attempt to expand the transgressive interval, that
moment at which the boundary, the limit, of transcendental thought be-
comes palpable, comes into view. However, before such exploration can

occur, we must have some understanding of the structures of Foucault's discourse that en*able* the event that *is* that expanding interval, so that we do not inadvertently cover it over or cause it to contract.

One of the most significant and powerful of the transgressive structures that Foucault erects is his rigorous nontheory, which complements his insistence that theory be recognized for the ally of transcendentality that it is. Theory is one of Foucault's targets. If we are to be historical thinkers, theory must be one of our targets as well. And we must insist that the nontheoretical, anti-theoretical nature of Foucault's work be acknowledged and respected.