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Can a Postmodern Philosopher Teach Modern Philosophy?

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Ten spring semesters out of the past twelve (and at two different universities), I have taught at least one and sometimes two sections of an undergraduate survey course in the history of modern Western philosophy (1600–1800, Descartes to Kant). This means many things. For example: (1) I have introduced approximately four hundred nineteen-years-olds to the joys of universal doubt and transcendental deduction; (2) I have made the stockholders in Hackett Publishing Company very happy; and (3) I have spent ten fall semesters wondering what in the world I—a feminist poststructuralist who writes on Foucault and Bataille—was doing teaching an entire course on dead white male metaphysicians. To be honest, although I enjoy teaching the course very much, I have always felt a little uneasy, even a little queasy, about it.

It isn't merely—in fact it isn't *primarily*—the content of the course, the particular thinkers and their systems, that make me uneasy. Despite their metaphysical misdirection, I believe it is extremely important that students learn of and engage with the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, the empiricists, and, of course, Kant. And poststructuralist and feminist philosophers have probably written at least as much on these men's work in the past three decades as Anglo-American philosophers have in the past half century.¹ The fact that I pay attention to these texts and historico-philosophical developments and expect my students to pay attention to them does not seem to constitute any sort of violation of my philosophical convictions. No, it isn't the texts or the thinkers *per se*; it is the course itself that gives me that feeling of uneasiness—the way the course, which is a standard one in most philosophy major programs, is structured and the functions that it serves.

Recently I was forced to think about my feelings about the course I teach, PHIL 272, when a friend asked me to give a paper in a

conference on teaching the history of philosophy.² In the invitation, she asked me to consider the following two questions: (1) When we teach the history of philosophy, what should we be doing? What should we be striving to accomplish? and (2) How do I, a poststructuralist thinker, approach the history of philosophy? Reading somewhat between the lines, I took her to be asking me to address the more general question: How should those of us with poststructuralist training and convictions go about teaching the history of philosophical thought and practice? I accepted the invitation but put off work on the paper for several months, for, while I am not prone to procrastinate regarding work in general, I am prone to avoid anything that makes me uncomfortable, and this question certainly did.

The truth is that I was not sure I was teaching the history of philosophy *as a poststructuralist*. My modern Western survey course did not seem to differ much if at all from the same course that hundreds of other philosophers of all persuasions teach and have been teaching for generations. My syllabus—except for its flashy manifestation on the web—is almost identical to the one Dr. O. C. Weaver used when he taught the course to me at Birmingham-Southern College in the spring of 1979.³ The texts are Descartes' *Meditations*, selections from Spinoza's *Ethics*, Leibniz's *Monadology*, and *Discourse on Metaphysics*, and selections from Locke's *Essay* and Hume's *Essay* and Kant's first critique. The course tells the story my department (and I think the American Philosophical Association and most graduate admissions committees) wants me to tell—how Western thought emerged from the Middle Ages (with its fanciful beliefs in things like degrees of reality), moved through the age of grand metaphysics (and its preoccupation with eternity and substance), and discovered the real significance of human finitude and with it the primacy of epistemology, at which point metaphysics began to come to an end. In other words, the course tells the story of how philosophers slowly became less like superstitious medieval thinkers and more like us (both us analytic philosophers and us continental philosophers); the course tells how the philosophical questions prominent in our age came to have pride of place. This story is obviously of great importance to professional philosophy in the present day, because it functions both as a historical account of our own philosophical emergence and as a rational justification for our concern with the issues that we feel are most significant.

The problem, from a poststructuralist perspective, is that the story the course tells does nothing to undermine the traditional assumptions that philosophers (at least in the United States) have been making about our discipline's history for the entirety of the twentieth century—which means that my course, as a result, appears to incorporate

nothing of what might be called the “postmodern” critique of that tradition and even to ignore the questions that that critique renders so pressing to me in my scholarship and more personal philosophical life. Hence the feeling that my teaching PHIL 272 was somehow hypocritical, the feeling that I was betraying my own convictions by teaching the canonical texts in the standard way.

Of course PHIL 272 isn't merely a philosophical *narrative*. If it were, I would not teach it; like a Homeric bard, I would merely recite it. Along with the syllabus, it is important to examine the pedagogy before jumping to the conclusion that courses like PHIL 272 stand in violation of my poststructuralist convictions. Therefore I undertook to do some thinking about pedagogical style.

In addition to telling a story—and offering an implicit justification for practices and values manifest in the present—it seems to me that those of us who teach courses like PHIL 272 (and I do not except myself) typically employ at least one of three pedagogical approaches—which I will call the representational, the phenomenological, and the conversational. Each of these carries within it a set of assumptions about the material presented, the function of the narrative, the nature of history, and the role of philosophical education in students' lives. I believe that these three approaches will be recognizable to anyone who teaches undergraduate courses in the history of philosophy and that alternatives to these three are hard for most of us to imagine.⁴ The problem is that all three involve philosophical assumptions that run counter to those we poststructuralist thinkers (as well as many others) actually hold.

The Representational Approach

One way to organize one's teaching of a historical survey is to see the course as an attempt at accurate representation of the historical facts. Through readings, lecture, and socratically crafted discussion, a professor builds up for students a picture of the major events in philosophical thinking—in the case of PHIL 272, events that occurred between the years 1600 and 1800. One recreates, to the extent possible, each philosopher's position and the arguments each put forward for his view, along with the most viable criticisms offered at the time. One demonstrates the ways in which successive philosophers took up and improved upon their contemporaries' or immediate predecessors' arguments or, alternatively, rendered them ineffectual and moved on to different ideas.

It sounds good—responsible, objective, politically neutral. It defines history, benignly enough, simply as “everything that happened in a given period of time.” History is a sealed container completely

filled, like a new jar of pickled eggs. The historian's job is, metaphorically speaking, to draw a diagram of the jar and its contents revealing every detail of every molecule of protein, glass, and brine. To do anything else is to misrepresent the period in question, to misrepresent the facts. However good this approach may sound, it has serious limitations. Even if one believed in the stability and accessibility of historical facts—and not only poststructuralists but most scholars of every stripe in this country ceased to believe in any such thing at least once Thomas Kuhn's book appeared in 1961—this undertaking would be doomed to woeful inadequacy if not outright failure. The practical difficulties are insurmountable. Take my own circumstances for example. Each spring I have two roomfuls of philosophical novices to whom I am to impart in fifteen weeks of fifty-minute hours excluding holidays, preholiday holidays, and postholiday recovery periods the systematic thinking of an entire age. And although this “age” has been arbitrarily reduced to the efforts of six (male) thinkers (a “misrepresentation” of tremendous magnitude already), still, these six together wrote thousands of pages in four different languages on dozens of topics. At best, any picture of this philosophical era could only have the flat and fragmented look of a half-finished paint-by-numbers reproduction—of a sealed jar of pickled eggs. The representational approach, then, is practically ineffectual. It is also, for me anyway, philosophically dubious because it refuses to place in question its own claim to objectivity in light of the critiques of that lofty notion current in poststructuralist, feminist, and even analytic epistemological circles. It lays claim, implicitly, to a view from nowhere and tries to impart knowledge that it presents as absolute and uninfluenced by social and political institutions and practices.

The Phenomenological Approach

A second way to understand what such a course in the history of philosophy is up to is to see it as a narrative of a historical sweep, a general outline of a movement of thought rather than an inventory of precise synchronic detail. Instead of trying to give students every piece of information a philosophical age might include, or at least all the details that one semester's time would allow, one might pick out the events, steps, stages, or developments within an age that moved it along, that contributed to its own self-fulfillment or, perhaps, to its internally generated demise. (I call this the phenomenological approach because it concerns itself with those events that manifest the appearance of History—conceived as development or transformation—as opposed to those that simply occur within the passage of time.) One

might present only *those* aspects of the period to students and expect them to grasp relations across philosophical thinkers and spans of time rather than details of arguments internal to each philosopher's work.

To approach history this way is to define it not just as time filled to the brim with occurrences but as a series of transformations or transformative events. Those events that are not transformative drop out; they are not part of History, *per se*. The problem with this approach, for a poststructuralist, is probably obvious. Because it assumes that history consists of a continuous line of systematic change rather than a collection of possibly unrelated events, it covers over discontinuities and differences. And, in doing that, it also tends to create an illusion of advancement. In fact, it usually assumes historical progression of the sort that Kant, in his political writings, embraced—precisely the sort that Michel Foucault, for one, critiqued.⁵ History is taking us somewhere, some *one* where, all of us. This approach thus puts forth what postmodernist thinker Jean-Francois Lyotard has criticized as a grand metaphysical narrative⁶—a thoroughly unified, totalizing story about the meaning of past events—even while it *purports* to speak of the coming end of metaphysics, to proclaim the end of metaphysics as its story's true meaning.

One might argue that even a philosopher skeptical of grand metaphysical narratives could use some elements of this approach; perhaps one could resist producing the effects typical of grand narrative while still approaching the course in this way by first staging the narrative and then disrupting or critiquing it. Students could be given the story and then made to witness the professor's attack on the story. In fact I have heard some continentalist colleagues espouse this technique. However, to stage the grand narrative in the first place is to reinforce it, it seems to me. After all, the narrative only exists in its own repetition. If we really want to rid our thought and our students' thought of grand philosophical narratives, the first thing we probably ought to do is stop recounting them and stop styling our philosophical work as mere attacks on them. Furthermore, we need to realize that an attack on grand narrative that purports to originate in a philosophical space outside of any such narrative at all, in some sort of pure epistemological zone devoid of metaphysical taint, is probably itself just a slightly mutated metaphysical enactment, a metaphysical stutter-step as it were. The phenomenological approach, like the representational, fails on its own terms *and* fails as a poststructuralist pedagogical strategy.

The Conversational Approach

A third approach to teaching historical survey courses in philosophy is to see them not so much as collections of facts or as stories *about*

philosophy or philosophical history but rather as occasions for students to engage in doing philosophy themselves. This might be called the “welcome to the great conversation” model of philosophical pedagogy. On this approach, the most important thing is not whether students know exactly what each philosopher in a specific period said or even how transformation in thought occurred historically but that they develop a portable philosophical skill, the ability to critique any and all philosophical positions while defending positions they adopt as their own. The problem with this approach from my perspective (informed as it is by poststructuralism in general and specifically by Foucault and feminist theory) is that it dehistoricizes and disembodies the history of thought. In fact, history is treated as more or less irrelevant. Any collection of philosophical arguments would work as well as any other for the cultivation of this skill, and there need be no connection of any sort—historical, thematic, or otherwise—between the various arguments to which students are asked to respond. But philosophy is not (historically speaking) a conversation for the same reason that Ronald Reagan was not a great communicator. Just as we did not get to talk back to Mr. Reagan after his press conferences, Descartes did not get to talk back to Spinoza after Spinoza wrote his commentary on Descartes' work, and Hume did not get a chance to comment on Kant's response to him. There was no give-and-take for the simple reason that these guys' bodies were not contemporaneous. Historically viewed, philosophy usually is not so much an intellectual tennis match as it is an intellectual skeet shoot with the dead guys serving as the skeet. Philosophical history does not consist in a bunch of philosophers saying howdy to one another in some virtual timeless present; and students cannot enter this non-existent discourse the way they can enter a chat room online. Philosophical exchanges are grounded in time, place, and bodies (even when they take place online). To forget that, in a history course, is to forget history—because history is, at the very least, passage, which involves loss, decay, and death; at the very least it is the absence of the full presence that the conversational approach so blithely assumes.

What's a Postmodernist to Do?

Now, having described these three pedagogical approaches and having critiqued and discarded each one in turn, I am left with my original problem. How is one to teach the history of philosophy if one's thought is informed by poststructuralist values, arguments, and critiques? One will have severe reservations about all three of these approaches and the assumptions they make and tend to perpetuate. Insofar as one enacts the position of a poststructuralist philosopher in the classroom,

one's goal is not to produce a perfectly accurate informational picture of the modern period. One is not trying to impart an outline of the progress of the historical Geist through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, one is likely to hope to undermine such conceptions of history. And presumably one has no voyeuristic necrophilic desire for one's students to engage in pseudodialogue with dead people. So what should one's goals be? How should one approach the history of philosophy? What should one do?

Sometimes it seems that all I am doing is trying to get through each semester without letting these embarrassing questions come up, because there does not seem to be any clear alternative to the three failed or impossible approaches that I have laid out here. Sometimes it seems that teaching the history of philosophy without violating poststructuralist presumptions and convictions is an impossible task.

I've read Friedrich Nietzsche's *Toward a Genealogy of Morals* enough times now to worry whenever I start feeling the need to enact my convictions, especially when the convictions in question are allegedly beyond good and evil and the ontotheological reverence for truth, fidelity, and purity that such values manifest. When I feel the tug of conscience telling me to be true to my philosophical beliefs, I know it is time to think again. If this question—how should a poststructuralist philosopher teach *anything?*—makes me feel that tug, it is time to rethink that question, or maybe the entire discursive situation in which that question occurs, or maybe raise a different question altogether and see where it leads.

It seems to me, upon reflection, that there are some assumptions working in that question, the most important of which is that there is a right way and many wrong ways for a poststructuralist philosopher to approach philosophical history. Is this assumption true? Confronting the question at this level, I feel confident that the answer is no. My poststructuralist and to some extent my feminist beliefs, values, attitudes, and projects lead me to reject the idea that there is a transcendent, universal, categorical imperative governing the teaching of PHIL 272 and the idea that I am violating any universal moral principles if I simply teach the course the way O. C. Weaver taught it to me twenty years ago.

Decisions about pedagogy are made in complex material situations. Therefore they, like all other decisions, are strategic rather than absolute. Time constraints are a legitimate consideration, for example, as is the potential for conflict with other members of my department over changes in the curriculum for which we are jointly responsible. I am a finite, embodied individual with limited resources who must work in cooperation with many others to accomplish anything at all, and cooperation with others almost always entails strategy.

However, this “no” does not get me off the hook. On the contrary, once it becomes one of strategy rather than universal normative principles, the question at issue has to become not “how should a poststructuralist teach the history of philosophy” but “how should I—*this* poststructuralist, *this* philosopher of whatever description—teach the history of philosophy, given my department, my students, and my projects and goals?” There is no single right way to teach the history of philosophy, but there may be a right way for me to teach it the next time I step into the classroom at the University of Richmond. And there certainly may be several wrong ways. When questions previously posed as universalistic moral or at least normative questions get refigured as questions of strategy—as practical questions in the more common sense of that term—they become *my* questions (or they are revealed as *my* questions), and as such they become inescapable.

How can I—this woman with these skills and this amount of time and various competing responsibilities and interests—take this course—PHIL 272 to be taught to nineteen-year-old upper-middle-class mostly white, mostly male University of Richmond students within the context of a very traditionally structured major program and a very traditionally structured philosophy profession—and suffuse it with the ideas, the commitments, the questions, and the insights of poststructuralist thought? How can I hold together the course as it is constituted by the dynamics of my department and my profession, by the limits on my time and imagination, with the philosophical attunements that are most characteristic of my work outside the classrooms where I teach PHIL 272?

Now, with the shifting of the question, the location of the problem has shifted as well. No longer am I positioning myself outside the pedagogical practice, outside the syllabus, outside the course as a whole and asking how can I intervene (a stance that gives rise to such suggestions as “stage the narrative and then disrupt it”). I am standing inside it—where I stand when I teach it—and I am wondering where within this story that I tell, within the texts and discussions that form this almost endlessly repeated fifteen-week narrative, there might be found the energies, the forces, the countermemories, the instabilities, and the vulnerabilities and strengths to bring this discourse to hear itself and to speak from within itself in new ways. I am asking what strategies I might use to bring this story to tell itself in such a way that it tells the story of its own telling, that it reveals itself as narrative, in the recounting of the events it wants to valorize. I am asking how I might prod the history of modern philosophy to historicize itself.

The story that traditionally is told through survey courses in modern philosophy—and that to a great extent I tell in PHIL 272—is, as

I said above, a story about our culture's slow recovery from the Middle Ages and in particular from the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. It is a very Protestant story about rationality, individuality, and honest labor. (This is what my students like about Descartes, although he remains medieval and Catholic in some crucial ways. They see him—probably much as some of them see themselves—as struggling to extricate himself from ecclesiastical, paternal authority and to think on his own, and they usually admire him for that. When they don't admire him, it is because he disappoints them by falling short, by not declaring his complete independence.) I want to ask: Are there places within this very Protestant story itself where rationality, individuality, and hard work become questionable?

This story is also a Peircean or Popperian story about our proximity to truth relative to our forebears and about self-improvement through self-criticism, wherein philosophical history is treated almost like an entity unto itself, an Hegelian subject that undergoes transformation as it reflects on its own accomplishments and shortcomings and emerges from its infancy into new self-awareness. A constant theme throughout the course is the importance of self-knowledge as, specifically, knowledge of where to stop. The story tells of an increasingly acute awareness of limit coupled with an intensifying dedication to the cultivation of the self-control necessary to remain within the limit. At crucial points—and this can be found in Descartes and Locke, as well as Kant—knowledge of limit comes to function as the prerequisite for any philosophical knowledge at all.⁷ I want to ask: Are there moments in this story where self-knowledge, self-discipline, and self-control become questionable?

This story, obviously, is one of historical progress, intellectual advancement. It devalues the more distant philosophical past in order to allow the present—our present—to come forth as justified in its preoccupations with analytic epistemology in the Anglo-American tradition as well as with the ontologies of finitude and deathliness that constitute much of the continental tradition throughout the twentieth century. As such, the story is both self-definitive and self-defensive for those of us who teach it and for our students who absorb it and take it seriously. It forms both our philosophical senses of ourselves and our philosophical self-justifications. No matter what some of us might say, we are not really beyond modern philosophy, as the very current narrative of our own philosophical pasts, quite yet. And this, it seems to me, is the crucial point, the place to stand when I—this poststructuralist thinker—teach.

Characterized in this way (not as the self-articulation of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought but as twentieth-century philosophy's account of its own emergence), this story is all the more crucial; it must

be told. We must recite it, and our students must be in possession of it—since they and we are, most likely, possessed and defined within and by it. To be ignorant of this story is to lack the tools to encounter, much less understand and participate in philosophy in the present day. And that is because this story is the way that so much philosophical thought *understands itself in the present day*. PHIL 272 is like an autobiography of mainstream *twentieth-century* Western thought. (It is important to remember that autobiographies are notoriously unreliable, but in philosophy as in everyday life they are probably indispensable as well.)

This is where I can stand then, my strategic location as a teacher of modern philosophy: Here at the point where there emerges an awareness that the story to be told is our story, an autobiography of philosophical existence in this century. It seems to me that the best way for me to bring my poststructuralist values and practices into my PHIL 272 classroom is to move with the energy of that autobiography's own values and to find ways to bring that story to bear upon itself, to take values elevated in that story and deploy them to question themselves. As I have already pointed out, two of the most important values embedded in modern philosophy are self-understanding and self-possession. I want to find ways to intensify the energy of those values, to foster that movement toward self-possession to the point that it turns its will to self-understanding and knowledge of limit upon itself, to the point that it reveals its own limit and, perhaps, its own inevitable transgression of limit, and therefore enacts and undergoes self-violation. It seems to me that I ought (strategically speaking) to look for the questions and issues within that autobiography that bend the quest for limit back upon the quest itself. Some of these points are obvious and easy to exploit.

For example, modern philosophy seeks to authorize the use of individual reason. I might ask, as most of us do when we teach this course, where reason acquires its authority. Is it self-authorizing? Do we have the authority to raise these questions? Can reason question itself? In other words, is the course's task—that of critiquing early modern philosophy—inherently self-undermining? I might raise these questions in class discussion or assign them as essay topics.

Likewise, I might raise the fairly common questions of embodiment and dualism: Does a Cartesian mind have a history? Since mind quite literally does not take place, does it make sense to view philosophy as historical? Would Descartes, Spinoza, or Leibniz have offered a course in the history of philosophy? Just here it seems to me that the anachronistic aspect of the course becomes evident. What does it mean that we are using these thinkers' texts to engage in a practice that purports to illuminate them but is in fact alien to them.

A third possibility for questioning: Descartes' project is metaepistemological; he wants not simply to know but to know that he knows. I might ask: Is knowledge valuable only when one knows it to be knowledge? What makes knowledge valuable? How do we know what makes knowledge valuable? Notice that it is not necessary to insert Nietzsche here. These questions can come right out of engagement with Descartes' own texts.

All of these questions are ways of taking the energy that drives the projects of philosophy as delineated in this narrative and turning it on itself. But as I have already suggested, the best place to do that work may be the point where the highest value becomes self-knowledge and the most important project becomes the analytic of finitude. Self-knowledge in this story increasingly becomes knowledge of the limits of the mind (something it was not in ancient philosophy, although the Socratic dictum is often construed this way now), and those limits continually tighten through the historical period under examination. One question to raise is whether the mind is so limited that full knowledge of its own limits is impossible, especially since knowledge of limit might be construed as already excessive of the limit, as knowledge of the not-self, the not-mind that lies beyond. Self-knowledge as an analytic of finitude might be inherently transgressive, self-violating—a thought that becomes not only possible but evident as students critique Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories. It is at this point that it might be possible to raise the question of whether the knowledge of philosophy's history that this story holds out is pervaded or even constituted by limit, which means by something very other to knowledge, whether the history this story seeks to remember is thoroughly shot through with something like forgetfulness. It is at this point that the autobiography may begin to hear itself as autobiography in all its notorious questionableness.

I cannot thoroughly redesign PHIL 272. I have to teach it within the strictures set up by my department and university and by our profession. If I'm going to suffuse that course as it currently exists with poststructuralist thought, I have to do so not by articulating the arguments and insights of that way of thought but by *enacting* that thinking in the classroom. I believe I can do that by keeping foremost in mind that the course is a story, a history of the present, twentieth-century philosophy's autobiography. With that in mind, the history of modern philosophy, just as traditionally periodicized and construed, can function as a springboard for launching us and our students into a process of self-examination that could be distinct from (what we often take to be) Socratic self-examination and certainly distinct from what Foucault calls the California cult of the self and more like a movement of self-disruption that might be a movement

toward self-transformation. If we as teachers do not propose to step outside the history of modern philosophy in order to speak from some “postmodern” pulpit but rather allow that history—our history—to examine itself on its own terms and through the force of its own obsessions and values and fears, it is very likely that while students are learning the story they must learn to be “responsible” members of our philosophical culture, they will also absorb a sense of the instability that characterizes this culture’s most fundamental tenets and cherished beliefs. We need not critique “the modern philosophical tradition” from a poststructuralist perspective that we insert like a bit of foreign matter into the syllabus or course itself. The tradition (or at least the story that purports to describe a tradition) carries its own forces of disruption. We have only to incite or invite those forces to the fore. That, I believe after much thought, is what it means for me, this poststructuralist philosopher, to teach the history of modern philosophy.

Notes

1. Some examples of feminist thinkers who have written on modern philosophers such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Hume are Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Descartes and Culture* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987); Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: “Male” and “Female” in Western Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London: Routledge, 1996). Some examples of postmodernist thinkers who have written on modern philosophers are Michel Foucault—see especially the articles on Kant in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997); Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); John Sallis, *Spacings—Of Reason and Imagination in the Texts of Kant, Fichte, Hegel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

2. My thanks to Dr. Susan Schoenbohm for the invitation to speak at the History of Philosophy Symposium at The Pennsylvania State University in November of 1998. Thanks also to Dr. Richard Lee, who did much of the organizational work for the conference.

3. You can see my syllabus on the web at <www.richmond.edu/~lmcwhort/PHIL272.html>.

4. I draw the distinctions among these three a bit too sharply here on purpose, to make my point. In fact, most of the time these are used in combination with one another. And, although I will set each one up as antithetical to some theme or notion in poststructuralist thought, in fact these antitheses, too, are far too sharp but rendered so in the interest of philosophical provocation.

5. Foucault’s most famous essay on Kant is his “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Politics of Truth*, 101–34. But Foucault became known as a philosopher opposed to the notion of historical progress and even—although not altogether accurately—to the notion of historical continuity after the publication of his book

Les mots et les choses in 1966. This book appeared in English translation as *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970).

6. See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

7. This is exactly the point at which Michel Foucault contrasts himself with Immanuel Kant. Foucault does not seek to know the limits of our thinking in order to stay within them. He seeks to know them in order to transgress them, perhaps overcome them, and move beyond them—a project that is not epistemological but rather ethical in Foucault's sense of that term. The point is not to be a responsible knower but to be open to difference and becoming, open to self-overcoming. See "What is Enlightenment?" especially page 126.

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