American Evasions of Foucault

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Referring above all to Charles Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, and John Dewey, John E. Smith claims that: "American thinkers have ever been open and receptive to points of view other than their own and they have welcomed the many different winds of philosophical doctrine from whatever quarter they have blown." The openness of a significant number of professional philosophers in the United States to Gadamer and Ricoeur, Lacan and Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, is evidence of the persistence of this spirit. But too often this openness is purchased at too high a price: too often familiarity with Derrida means ignorance of Peirce (even though Derrida himself has spent time reading Peirce), too often a critical engagement with Foucault means a wholesale neglect of Dewey, etc. It is not always simply a matter of limited time and energy, but one of restricted sympathies and receptivity. Indeed, the celebration of difference can function as an effective means of insuring the same old marginalizations and exclusions of classical American philosophy in contemporary American universities. Here it is instructive to recall James's insistence that: "Real culture lives by sympathies and admirations, not by dislikes and disdains ...." To prove oneself cultured in the United States requires, all too often, showing oneself to be clever in expressing one's contempt for what calls itself culture in the United States, including what calls itself philosophy. Some of those scholars in the United States who are most conversant with the texts of contemporary Continental European authors wear as a badge of pride an ignorance of indigenous philosophical movements, whereas those here who identify themselves with these movements not infrequently betray the spirit of Peirce, James, Royce, and Dewey when they fail to examine carefully the dominant movements of Continental European thought. This is of course only part

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of the story, for there are countless individuals on both sides who are receptive to, and indeed appreciative of, winds of doctrine blowing from afar.

There is perhaps no more important exchange to be facilitated by such individuals than that between Foucault and Dewey.\(^3\) The receptivity of contemporary philosophy in the United States can be significantly measured by the response of those in this country working outside of circles preoccupied with Continental European philosophy. "The challenge of Michel Foucault" is an expression taken from Cornel West's book on *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, a work whose subtitle—*A Genealogy of Pragmatism*—bears witness to the influence of Foucault.\(^4\)

Two of the most prominent figures in contemporary American philosophy (Richard Rorty and Cornel West), figures who see themselves as part of the tradition of pragmatism, truly exhibit the receptivity properly characteristic of philosophical thought in the United States. But, in their respective works on American pragmatism, their treatment of Foucault ironically signals not so much an engagement with, as an evasion of, the challenge of this Nietzschean genealogist of late modernity. It is, for me, Michel Foucault the Nietzschean genealogist who most deserves critical engagement and creative appropriation. I take him seriously when he claims that: "I am simply Nietzschean, and I try to see, on a number of points, and to the extent that it is possible, with the aid of Nietzsche's texts—but also with anti-Nietzschean theses (which are nevertheless Nietzschean)—what can be done in this or that domain. I'm not looking for anything else but I'm searching for that."\(^5\) But Rorty's *Consequences of Pragmatism*\(^6\) and West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy* embody what arguably might be called two American evasions of Foucault. It is instructive to see how this occurs in both cases, for both might serve as object lessons for a missed opportunity. But my goal is not so much to contest Rorty and West as to conjoin Dewey and Foucault. One way to accomplish this conjunction is, however, to examine how Rorty and West fail in the name of pragmatism to discern a deep affinity of far-reaching philosophical and possibly practical significance.

**I. RORTY'S EVASION OF FOUCALUT'S CHALLENGE**

In the Introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty asserts that: "James and Nietzsche make parallel criticisms of nineteenth-century thought. Further, James's version is preferable, for it avoids the 'metaphysical' elements in Nietzsche which Heidegger criticizes, and, for that matter, the 'metaphysical' elements in Heidegger [himself] which
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Derrida criticizes.” Rorty goes on to claim that, on his view, “James and Dewey were not only waiting at the end of the dialectical road which analytic philosophy traveled, but are waiting at the end of the road which, for example, Foucault and Deleuze are currently traveling.” A footnote to this claim sends us to the concluding section of an essay in Consequences entitled “Method, Social Science, and Social Hope,” this concluding section being itself entitled “Ungrounded Hope: Dewey vs. Foucault.”

When one turns to this section, one learns that Rorty the self-proclaimed pragmatist finds Foucault’s Nietzschean debunking of the philosophical tradition and his penetrating analyses of the “dark side of the social sciences” to be praiseworthy undertakings. He goes so far as to suggest that “Dewey and Foucault make exactly the same criticism of the tradition. They agree, right down the line, about the need to abandon traditional notions of rationality, objectivity, method, and truth.” The difference between them—one that for Rorty can make a difference—has nothing to do with their philosophical positions and everything to do with their practical orientations: “We should see Dewey and Foucault differing not over a theoretical issue, but over what we may hope.” Rorty himself wonders if this difference between them is “merely one of tone—an ingenuous Anglo-Saxon pose as opposed to a self-dramatizing Continental one.” But tone suggests too superficial a difference; rather “something like ‘moral outlook’” is needed to mark the most important respect in which these two thinkers diverge.

They converge in their critique of the dominant tradition of Western philosophy and, of even greater significance, in the moral they draw from this critique, namely, “that there is nothing much more to ‘man’ except one more animal, until culture, the meshes of power, begin to shape him into something else.” There is no transhistorical subject nor any transcendent foundation for our normative discourses; there are only historically constituted subjects and historically defined discourses. Our identities no less than our standards of evaluation are historical in the strongest possible sense. There is nothing “outside the haphazard and perilous experiments we perform” to which we can appeal to justify some experiments and to condemn others. In Rorty’s judgment, Foucault’s term power and Dewey’s term culture “are equipollent indications of the social forces which makes us more than animals—and which, when the bad guys take over, can turn us into something worse and more miserable than animals.”

Where Foucault and Dewey supposedly diverge is that hope and solidarity, two central ideals of bourgeois liberalism, are jettisoned by Foucault but preserved by Dewey. So it seems to Rorty that Dewey has “done it better, simply because his
vocabulary allows room for unjustifiable hope, and an ungroundable but vital sense of human solidarity.16

Rorty’s account of neither Dewey nor Foucault is entirely accurate. Let us first, and only briefly, consider Dewey. While it is true that, for him, in an ultimate or cosmic sense our hopes are ungrounded, there is a more proximate and human sense in which we might distinguish between justifiable and fantastic (or historically rooted versus historically ungrounded) hopes. Dewey is quite explicit about this distinction. For example, he asserts in Individualism Old and New that:

Ideals, including that of a new and effective individuality, must themselves be framed out of the possibilities of existing conditions ... The ideals take shape and gain a content as they operate in remaking conditions.17

A closely related assertion is one found in A Common Faith: “We are in the presence neither of ideals completely embodied in existence nor yet of ideals that are mere rootless ideals, fantasies, utopias. For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals.”18 Finally, for our purposes, we should recall what Dewey identifies in The Public and Its Problems as “the only intelligible sense of an ideal,” namely, “the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected” (insofar as finality, completion, and perfection are ascribable to ongoing processes and practices).19 None of this suggests groundless or ungroundable hope. Dewey is no more a champion of ungrounded hope than Foucault is an advocate of a pessimistic outlook.

Let us now turn to Foucault. He strikes me as not a pessimist but a meliorist, one who is continuously working to expose contingencies in the cause of facilitating innovations. The “task of philosophy is,” according to Foucault, “to describe the nature of the present, and of ‘ourselves in the present’.”20 This task is diagnostic. The function of this diagnosis “does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are [and all global characterizations are perforce simple] but, instead—by following lines of fragility in the present—in managing to grasp why and how that—which-is might no longer be that—which-is.” By diagnosing the present in this way, we can “open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom—i.e., of possible transformation.” One might argue that for Foucault the different is in effect equated with the better,21 but certainly his account of the operations of power suggests omnipresent possibilities of effective resistance and local transformation.22

I think that two apparently contradictory texts from William James’s “What Makes a Life Significant” can be used to
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appreciate the two-sided character of Foucault's self-critical meliorism. On the one hand, James asserts that "the thing of deepest—or, at any rate, of comparatively deepest—significance in life does seem to be its character of progress, of that strange union of reality with ideal novelty which it continues from one moment to another to present." For Foucault the most crucial things in life are the opportunities it affords for innovation and experimentation. On the other hand, James astonishingly contends that "those philosophers are right who contend that the world is a standing thing, with no progress, no real history. The changing conditions of history touch only the surface of the show." The elimination of the more obvious and brutal forms of oppression and injustice hides the institution of more subtle but no less real forms. Even so, the possibilities of local innovations and ameliorations are virtually ubiquitous, whereas any assessment of global progress is always the judgment of an agent implicated in more than one societal position, these positions themselves being densely sedimented loci in what is always less than a coherent social order.

Foucault is, in a sense, a post-revolutionary philosopher who feels that the self-deluded hopes of revolutionaries are as silly as the self-serving delusions of conservatives are repugnant. He is, also in a sense requiring qualification, an anarchist because he thinks, contra conservatives, that established institutions are relatively stable structures, and, contra revolutionaries, that local, piecemeal, uncoordinated, even purely individual experimentations are cumulatively significant achievements. The hysteria of conservatives is rooted in their sense of the fragility of established institutions, while the blindness of revolutionaries is traceable to their sense of the futility of local innovations.

While I have characterized Foucault as a meliorist, thereby implying that he is neither a pessimist nor optimist, he occasionally described himself as an optimist. For example, he told Didier Eribon at the conclusion of an interview in 1981 that:

There's an optimism that consists in saying that things couldn't get better [just as there's one that consists in believing that things must inevitably get better]. My optimism would consist rather in saying that so many things can be changed, fragile as they, bound up more with circumstances than necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constraints ...

His genealogies are linked to his hope that so many things can be changed. Take, for example, the dominant conceptions of
human rationality. While he insists that "no given form of rationality is actually reason," he also insists that these forms are not utterly irrational. The network of contingencies from which the forms of rationality emerge can be traced. These forms "reside on a base of human practice and human history; and since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made." The function of Foucault's genealogies is to exhibit how such things actually were made, so that they may be re-made (i.e., reconstructed).

If the differences in tone between Dewey and Foucault were (as Rorty suggests) rooted in what might be called a "moral outlook," these differences in their outlooks were themselves linked to differing depths of personal estrangement from their respective cultures. For example, their respective conscriptions in a heterosexist regime were, apparently, uncontested by Dewey but manifestly resisted by Foucault. But, in general Dewey was as suspicious of facile appeals to community as Foucault was open to the multiple possibilities for solidarity. Indeed, Foucault's abiding suspicions served meliorism in the name of what at present can only be (for the most part) an ineffable and undefined community. Solidarity, like hope, is not precluded by Foucault's suspicions and problematizations. These suspicions and problematizations reveal the hope of making things over, of fracturing established totalities and (within the resulting fissures) forging novel associations. In direct response to the sort of criticism indicated above, he asserts that:

R[ichard] Rorty points out that I do not appeal to any 'we'—to any one of those 'we's' whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a 'we' in order to assert the principles one recognizes and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather necessary to make the future formation of a 'we' possible by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the 'we' must not be previous to the question [that the presumption of solidarity should not be prior to the exercise of suspicion]; it can only be the result—and the necessarily temporary result of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it.

What Dewey says about "local communities" whose loci of actualization are communicative exchanges is close to the form of solidarity being endorsed by Foucault in this text. For both, this "we" is likely to become "a community of action" and thus an agent of reconstruction. The assertive hope embodied in the indefatigable efforts of both Dewey and Foucault to par-
ticipate in such communities of action reveals (to use Rorty’s own expression) “a vital sense of human solidarity.”

II. WEST’S EVASION OF FOUCAULT’S CHALLENGE

Whereas Rorty supposes that the pragmatists James and Dewey have blazed a trail and thereby attained vantage points which Foucault was even at the time of his death still only working toward, Cornel West seems to imply that Foucault is not so much a fellow traveler, albeit a bit belated, as for the most part an obstacle in the ever elusive path of effective critique. In *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (the title of this book being obviously indebted to Foucault’s own distinctive approach to our normative and normalizing procedures [see, e.g., 223]), West takes up “The Challenge of Michel Foucault” after his encomium to “Robert Unger and Third-Wave Left Romanticism.” He describes Unger’s multivolume work *Politics* as “the most significant and elaborate effect to put forward a Marxist-informed (though not Marxist) democratic social vision.” Moreover, he identifies “Unger’s distinctive contribution to contemporary social thought” to be that of providing the conceptual resources “to deepen and sharpen in a radical manner John Dewey’s notion of social experimentation in light of the crisis of Marxist theory and praxis.” Finally, he labels Unger’s project “Third-Wave Left Romanticism” in order to distinguish it from two earlier waves of such romanticism.

In contrast to Unger’s “unabashedly pronounced romanticism,” West sets Foucault’s militantly maintained antiromanticism. Foucault, more than anyone else, stands in the way of feeling the force and thus of responding to the appeal of Unger’s project. To praise Unger’s project and, beyond this, to endorse a prophetic pragmatism animated by romantic hope “is to go against the grain in some progressive circles owing to the influence of Michel Foucault.” It is to open oneself to the charge of naivety. In contrast to Unger, Foucault is deeply suspicious of appeals to solidarity, community, liberation, and equally suspicious of any talk about inclusive totalities, humanitarian practices, benevolent bureaucracies, our shared humanity, a brighter future. Before elaborating his three reasons for rejecting Foucaultian antiromanticism, however, West briefly signals his two-fold agreement. First, prophetic pragmatism *would be* naive if it did not attend to “the operations of power”; second, it seizes as an indispensable tool the genealogical mode of critical intervention. Preoccupation with the operations of power and reliance on genealogy as a method of inquiry and interrogation are, then, the two most crucial areas where West’s project overlaps with Foucault’s.
Despite these areas of agreement, the reasons for disagreement cut so deeply as to prompt West to speak of his rejection of Foucault. They number three and express what are in my judgment widespread but erroneous views of what Foucault was about. A more accurate understanding of the Foucault with whom West most directly deals would, I suggest, reveal a thinker quite close to Dewey's own antiromantic version of ameliorative pragmatism, though (of course) not to West's romantic position of prophetic pragmatism. Recall that my underlying purpose here is not to pit myself against West (or Rorty), but to link Dewey with Foucault.

Despite his fondness for the poetry of Wordsworth, Dewey was like Foucault deeply suspicious and severly critical of the romantic sensibility. For example, he notes in Human Nature and Conduct that: “The glorification of affection and aspiration at the expense of thought is a survival of romantic optimism.” With the Romantic poet Shelley, Dewey insists that imagination “is the chief instrument of the good”, but, against prosaic romanticism, he further insists that thought is an indispensable aid to any form of imagination dissatisfied with dissipating into private fancies and desirous of making over cultural institutions. Though processes of making over—of reconstructing—such institutions “must start with imaginative idealizations instigated by the release of generous impulse, they can be carried through only when the hard labor of observation, memory and foresight weds the vision of imagination to the organized efficiencies of habit.” Dewey astutely observes that: “A rebellious disposition is also a form of romanticism.” From the context, it is clear that his meaning is this: A purely rebellious disposition is a form of romanticism, because it uncritically celebrates the release of frustrated impulses and condemns the value of traditional institutions; in this, it unduly neglects the importance of directing those impulses. Energy needs to be directed as well as released, directed not from on high but from within the flux itself. This is a point to which I will return later in connection with West's portrayal of Foucault as a pessimist. What needs to be stressed at this juncture is that Dewey explicitly distanced himself from romanticism, seeing this position as one side of a self-sustaining pair of self-defeating positions (cynicism disguised as realism and romanticism defined by its irresponsible flight from the actual and, moreover, its uncritical celebration of the natural, the affective, the immediate, etc.).

A. First Charge: The Perpetuation of Transcendental Philosophy

West's first reason for rejecting Foucault's approach is that this approach remains circumscribed within “a general Kantian framework.” West charges that Foucault is insistent on asking “questions such as ‘What are the conditions for...
possibility of the constitution of the subject?"46 That Foucault gives a Nietzschean answer to a Kantian question regarding the constitution of subjectivity does not, in West's judgment, diminish Foucault's commitment to a style of inquiry that presumes a perspective outside of history; for "the question itself is inextricably tied to a conception of validity that stands above and outside the social practices of human beings."46 In addition, Foucault's answer (like those of crude Hegelians, vulgar Marxists, and academic Kantians [West's line up, not mine!]) shuns "the centrality of dynamic social practices structured and unstructured over time and space."47

This criticism of Foucault seems to be not merely inaccurate, but wildly mistaken. To be sure, the form in which Foucault sometimes casts his thought might incline his readers to suppose that he is engaged in what Kant would call a transcendental inquiry. But this occasional form ought not to hide from us the overriding function of Foucaultian inquiry, namely, painstaking attention to the social practices in and through which distinctive forms of human subjectivity are constituted.48 Foucault never supposes these practices to be anything but historically evolved and evolving constellations of rules, directives, procedures, etc. He never supposes them to be historical embodiments of atemporal structures or ahistoric forms.

In "What Is Enlightenment?" (a text in which Foucault's affinities to Kant are most likely to manifest themselves), Foucault at once highlights some important respects in which his own project is continuous with Kant and pinpoints his difference from Kant. "We have to move beyond the outside-inside alternative."49 That is, it cannot be simply a question of being inside or outside a Kantian framework; "we have to be at the frontiers."50 The way Foucault marks his difference from Kant underwrites my disagreement with West:

But if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge has to renounce transgressing, it seems to me that the critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.51

Having drawn this contrast, Foucault then makes explicit what he calls "an obvious consequence":

criticism is no longer to be practiced in the search for formal structures and universal value, but rather as a historical inves-
tigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental ... it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method ... 52

Countless other texts might be marshaled to support our conclusion, pace West: There is in Foucault never any presumption of being able to pry ourselves apart from our practices, thereby attaining a perspective above and outside of them. The possibility of transcendental reflection is considered by him to be illusory, the necessity of historical reflection of a distinctive form to be imperative. If anything, the stress on historicity is so emphatic that it can easily lead one to suppose that any effective critical distance from, and resistance to, our actual historical engagements is, for Foucault, an impossibility. 53

B. Second Charge: The Effacement of Human Agency

West himself in effect levels just this criticism against Foucault when he announces his second reason for rejecting this antiromantic. As a result of the way Foucault (allegedly) reifies discourses, disciplines, and techniques, he downplays human agency both in its individual and collective forms to the point of virtually denying it. 54 West takes Foucault to ascribe agency exclusively to "impersonal forces, transcendental entities, or anonymous and autonomous discourses," thereby denying such power to individual persons or human communities. 55

Two distinctions need to be drawn here. First, it is instructive to distinguish between earlier texts and later ones. Foucault in works like The Order of Things (originally published as Les Mots et les choses in 1966) 57 and The Archaeology of Knowledge (L'Archéologie du savoir in 1969) was preoccupied with (among other concerns) decentering what he calls the sovereign or transcendental subject, whereas in his later work he is far more concerned with the constitution of specific types of human subjectivity. 58 While the earlier works are not strictly speaking structuralist, they are closer to structuralism than are the later ones.

The second distinction concerns the important difference between repudiating an agency in effect outside of history and denying agency in any sense whatsoever. Whatever form of agency can be ascribed to humans, it must be one that stresses the ways and depth to which this form is a function of history. The deconstruction of the Cartesian subject opens both theoretical and practical space for exploring the constitution of human bodily subjects who, by virtue of their subjections and disciplining, exhibit a historically determinate form of human agency. In constructing genealogies of how subjects are consti-
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tuted, Foucault is not denying the reality of subjects nor the depth to which subjects are agents. The body subjected to the disciplines of its culture is always to some extent a source of resistance and recalcitrance; but this body is simultaneously complicit with the regimes in which it is inscribed. Despite this ineluctable complicity, this body is, at least potentially, other than countless particulars of any particular regimes.

What Jacques Derrida once said in defense of himself might, with even greater force, have been said by Michel Foucault in defense of himself:

... I didn't say that there was no center, that we could get along without the center. I believe that the center is a function, not a being. And this function is absolutely indispensable. The subject [too] is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; I situate it. That is to say, I believe that at a certain level of experience and of philosophical and scientific discourse one cannot get along without the notion of subject. It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions. Therefore I keep the concept of center ... as well as that of subject, and the whole system of conceptions to which you [Serge Doubrovsky] have referred.

Of course, this emphasis on the subject as a function emerging in history is also central to Dewey's treatment of this topic. To use Derrida's expression, the parallels between Foucault and Dewey's efforts to situate human subjectivity and agency (efforts often taken to entail the elimination of human selves and actors), to show whence they come and how they function, are striking. Dewey too stresses that human subjectivity is an emergent function, not an antecedently given one, much less an originally determinate substance. Moreover, he distinguishes two senses of the term subject. "The subject is [in one sense] that which suffers, [that which] is subjected and endures resistance and frustration ..." It is that which is continuously subjected to the disciplining effects of its everyday interactions and, as a result, forms a distinctive sensibility. But Dewey notes a second sense of subject: "it is also that which attempts subjection to hostile conditions; that which takes the immediate initiative in remaking the situation as it stands." In this second sense, subjectivity means agency: to be a subject is to be not merely a site of subjection but also a source of initiation and innovation or at least resistance and refusal. These two senses of course do not designate two separate beings but rather two distinguishable aspects of the human organisms as an agent-patient. For Dewey the subject is "a distinctive center of desire, thinking, and aspiration"; s/he is, in and through associations with others, "a conscious centre of experience." This center is by no means fixed or indivis-
ible; nonetheless, from the site of one’s body there emanate desires, gestures, utterances, etc., for which one assumes some degree of authorship or responsibility.\textsuperscript{67} That from which desires, gestures, judgments, etc., emanate and that to (at, toward) which the desires, gestures, judgments, etc., of others are addressed assist in establishing one’s distinctive sense of embodied agency.\textsuperscript{68}

“Individuality is,” as Dewey notes, “inexpugnable because it is a manner of distinctive sensitivity, selection, choice, response, and utilization of conditions ... A native manner of selection gives direction and continuity, but definite expression is found in changing occasions and varied forms.”\textsuperscript{69} Involvement in these occasions and use of these forms transform in deep ways those involved in these occasions and given to the use of these forms of expression, affectivity, and exertion. “Individuality is at first spontaneous and unshaped [imperative yet inchoate]; it is a potentiality ... Even so, it is a unique manner of acting in and with a world of objects and persons.”\textsuperscript{70} Individuality is neither self-contained nor self-enclosed, “like a closet in a house or a secret drawer in a desk, filled with treasures that are waiting to be bestowed on the world.” It is rather a “distinctive way of feeling the impacts of the world,” of experiencing the omnipresent pressures of power relations, and in turn of expressing one’s preferential biases in an ever shifting scene of complex negotiations. Individuality so conceived obviously takes “shape and form only through interaction with actual conditions.”\textsuperscript{71} It cannot be completely pried apart from the conditions out of which it emerges as something more or less determinate and in which it functions as someone more or less effective in turning relations of power to its own purposes.\textsuperscript{72}

Pragmatism, prophetic or otherwise, cannot recognize any form of human agency other than the emergent function of an ongoing history. In general, it is necessary to realize that “the things that seem most evident to us [e.g., our very selves] are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history.”\textsuperscript{73} In particular, we must come to appreciate how erroneous it is to conceive individuals as “something given, something already there.”\textsuperscript{74} They are from the beginning of their lives put in a variety of places and thereby subjected to a regime of disciplines.\textsuperscript{75} This does not mean that they are purely passive or perfectly docile in their submission to the enforcement of codes. It does mean that they are irreducibly historical: peel away the layers of history and there is nothing left of the onion of our subjectivity. But these layers do add up to a determinate, effective presence, though one that can never be fully present to itself. The incapacity to be fully present to itself does not entail the incapacity to be effectively present in con-
crete circumstances: Foucaultian subjects are, in their productions and innovations as well as their resistances and refusals, effective agents or, better, co-agents.76 In sum, historically situated subjects can be historically effective agents and, indeed, their agency is enhanced by their detailed understanding of their own actual histories. Foucault's genealogies are consciously designed to provide just such an understanding, for the purpose of enhancing possibilities of agency in the present. In sum, West's second charge does not stick to Foucault.

C. Third Charge: The Elimination of Moral Discourse

West's third and final criticism is that Foucault so thoroughly "devalues moral discourse" that he undermines the possibility of moral critique and, thereby, of moral transformation itself.75 One might express the ground of West's rejection in this way: the most that Foucault can offer is a resolutely amoral form of antiromantic rebellion, while what we need is nothing less than an explicitly moral form of romantic engagement. In quite different terms, Richard J. Bernstein formulates an analogous criticism of the Foucaultian refusal to affirm or even to acknowledge the values and ideals by which Foucault's genealogical critiques are, apparently, authorized. When push comes to shove, or when altering an institution or practice is presented as not only possible but desirable, we want to know: In the name of what, and for the benefit of whom, are we being enjoined to make such changes, to undertake such reconstructions?78

In defense of Foucault, it is important to distinguish between the universal intellectual who presumes the right to speak for others and the specific intellectual who not only refuses to exercise this "right" but also challenges the putative right and thus the very possibility of the universal intellectual. Then it is imperative to stress the Socratic function of the specific intellectual.79 This should help to identify the "moral" impulse prompting Foucault's characteristic refusals to make moral pronouncements.

In an interview in 1972, Gilles Deleuze remarked directly to Foucault that: "In my opinion, you were the first—in your books and in the practical sphere—to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others. We ridiculed representation and said it was finished, but we failed to draw the consequences of this 'theoretical' conversion—to appreciate the theoretical fact that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf."80 Foucault's own words forcefully make clear his reticence in this regard:

The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions, and programs that intellectuals have
managed to formulate over the last two centuries and whose effects we can now see. The work of an intellectual is not to shape others' political will; it is, through the analyses he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual [we might say, in which he carries out his task as a specific intellectual]) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as citizen to play).81

Closely allied to this refusal to speak for others is Foucault's dream of a new form of critical discourse:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but to bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would multiply, not judgments, but signs of existence; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would invent them sometimes—all the better. Criticism that hands down sentences sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating leaps of the imagination. It would not be sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms.82

In West's judgment, Foucault perpetuates the debilitating assumptions of a discredited framework, effaces human agency, and undermines moral discourse as an effective instrument of social change. The first criticism is, in my judgment, wildly mistaken, whereas the second is somewhat plausible and the third is even more so. But the criticisms concerning human agency and that concerning normative discourse are not fatal. In fact, as I have tried to suggest above, a more sympathetic reading of Foucault's later texts would reveal that there is a robust sense of human agency being defended and indeed celebrated, linked to a distinctive philosophical ethos.83 This ethos is itself linked to an unblinkingly historicist orientation.

Mark Philp anticipated West and Bernstein in voicing the criticism that what Foucault champions (namely resistant, innovative subjects animated by emancipatory ideals) is what Foucault denies himself and us. "For Foucault, we are poor things, and rarely our own."84 Moreover, given his assumptions and conclusions, it is difficult "to understand why people should struggle and what they should struggle for."85 Finally, it is difficult to suppose that Foucaultian subjects possess the sort of agency that would enable them to undertake Foucaultian experiments. But Philp (as does Bernstein but apparently not West) has misgivings about the justice of his own
criticism. He realizes that, "for all his archaeological metaphors," Foucault "is not so much excavating a new territory for theory as undermining old areas of certainty."86 The result is that "we are left ... with a field for our differences, struggles, resistances." We are in effect thrown back on ourselves by Foucault's resolute reticence regarding moral pronouncements. Then Philp tellingly concludes his account by stressing that: "This may leave us no longer sure who and what we essentially are, but Foucault will have succeeded if he has left us believing that no one can know this with greater certainty than ourselves."87 The uncertainty that Foucault tries to induce here is akin to the perplexity about the familiar, the unquestioned, that Socrates sought to engender in his interlocutors. The Socratic function of the specific intellectual is not to impart wisdom but to open the quest, by exposing the questionableness of the unquestioned. It is also maieutic, for it aims at assisting others in giving birth to their own projects of self-overcoming.

Authoritative discourses regarding human behavior all too easily lend themselves to becoming—or worse, transform themselves into being—authorizing discourses for authoritarian practices in which the care for the self is put into the hands of others. The acquisition of muteness is, all too often, a consequence of being subjected to the authority of some discourse. To become articulate—especially for children, or criminals, or the sexually "deviants," or the mentally ill, to learn to speak, to give voice to their own experiences and thus to give shape and force to their own lives—requires that specific intellectuals be both reticent and outspoken (keep certain untraditional silences but also break certain traditional silences). The point of such intellectuals is not to speak for others but to help them create fora in which these others might speak for themselves. Their responsibility is to relinquish in large measure their supposed authority and to contest in countless contexts the authoritative, thus silencing, discourses of those who in effect (if not also in intent) presume the role of speaking for others. This responsibility does not presume to impose what everyone ought to do but only to propose what some might hope to undertake. Universal, necessary obligation is eclipsed by specific, contingent hopes.

The authority of the self over the self and far more so that of others over the self should give way to the care for the self in which the only authority is the partial, provisional, and precarious expertise of engaged, thoughtful, and courageous experimentalists.88 The care for one's self as someone always already implicated and even complicit in regimes of power requires, as Dewey noted near the conclusion of Individualism Old and New, a double tactical move. This move is also a double textual gesture, since it takes the form of juxtaposing
two passages from Emerson. As Dewey recalls, the “same Emerson who said that ‘society is everywhere in conspiracy against its members’ also said, in the same essay, ‘accept the place the divine Providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events.’” Of course, when speaking of Foucault or Dewey, it is appropriate to speak of human history not divine Providence. Also, it is important to stress that accepting one’s place does not mean “knowing one’s place” as this has been defined by those conspiring against one; rather, it involves resisting the lure of either a nostalgia for a past that never was or a hope for a future that never will be. It is passionately embracing the present by exploring, via genealogies, the possibilities inherent in the actual present and by engaging, through direct actions, these present actualities.

If practicing criticism is, as Foucault suggests, “a matter of making facile gestures difficult,” we still need to appreciate the difference between making gestures, appeals, moves, etc. difficult and showing them to be impossible. Too often some of Foucault’s followers appear to suppose that in rendering a practice problematic we have therefore shown it to be without any basis or validity. It may be, however, that the problematic character of a human practice is compatible with endorsing the validity or usefulness of that practice. Foucault’s reticence is, while morally motivated, often itself tactically problematic or perhaps even misguided. His cause might be advanced on occasion (and only occasionally) by more explicit appeals to what he specifically presumes to be not only the basis for his critique but also for his tactical allegiance to some particular practice, institution, or discourse.

CONCLUSION

If we read Foucault in light of Dewey and, in turn, Dewey in light of Foucault, what emerges is a critical perspective in which the romantic character of a purely rebellious disposition is checked, on the one hand, and the equally romantic nature of an insistently irenic (or meditating) orientation are countered, on the other. “It is a question of making conflicts more visible, of making them more essential than mere confrontations of interest or mere institutional immobility. Out of these conflicts, these confrontations, a new power relation must emerge ....”

“To view institutions as enemies of freedom, and all conventions as slaveries, is to deny the only means by which positive freedom in action can be secured.” The need for a sustaining sense of connectedness is real, but no more so than the need for effective strategies of transgression, disruption, confrontation.

Earlier I noted that Rorty wonders whether the difference between Foucault and Dewey is, at bottom, merely one of tone.
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Perhaps it is, but then perhaps differences in tone can be differences of moment. "'Tone,' to be sure, is" as Jones observed, "a terribly vague word to use, but there is no other ... By their tone are all things human either lost or saved"—capable of either eliciting our ridicule or winning our allegiance. "It all reverts in the end to the actions of innumerable imitative individuals upon each other and the question of whose tone has the highest spreading power."95 In light of Foucault and Dewey, we might alter this text to read: it all reverts to the local, crisscrossing, shifting exercises of power by embodied, enculturated agents who are, at once, imitative and innovative. The tone of high moralism is not likely to attract such agents, whereas the tone of a resolute amoralism, one defined by its deliberate refusals to speak and thus by its carefully sustained silences96 no less than its courageously broken silences, is likely to spread. For such agents at this time tend to have an acute sense of their own precarious status and fluid character: they feel themselves and their lives to be experiments without any assurances of success or even any antecedently fixed criteria by which to judge their exertions and innovations. Of course, there are inherited criteria and exemplars whose value to experimentalists cannot be gainsaid. But their value to us can be ascertained only in the ongoing course of complex histories, ones encompassing non-discursive as well as discursive practices. To sustain our processes of experimentation and indeed to initiate new ones, much is needed—hope and solidarity, to be sure, but also at some moments Nietzschean playfulness and at others Jamesian earnestness. One catches the tone of such playfulness in Foucault's texts, but one also catches the tone of a tireless scholar and committed activist.97 That one frequently misses the tone of playfulness and irony in Dewey's own text might be part of the reason why his experimentalism has, in many circles, not fared as well as Foucault's.98 For both Foucault and Dewey, all we have are our own experiments and the histories in which they are rooted and out of which they are growing. This points to their philosophical kinship. In failing to discern this kinship, Rorty and West in effect evade the challenge of Michel Foucault. In contesting their interpretations and critiques, I hope to have shown that, for a Deweyan pragmatist, critical engagement with this Nietzschean genealogist is the appropriate response.

NOTES

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In a recent work entitled *Genealogical Pragmatism: Philosophy, Experience and Community*, John J. Stuhr demonstrates some of the most important ways of executing this task. He, along with several other individuals—Charles Scott, “Comments on Foucault’s Anachronistic Truths” in *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 547–7; Mitchell Aboulafia, *The Mediating Self: Mead, Sartre, and Self-Determination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); also Ken Stikkers, Kory Sorrell, and Michael McGandy—have been very helpful to me in contributing to this endeavor.


Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, xviii.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, xviii.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 204.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 204.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 204.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 203.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 205.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 208.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 208.

Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 208.


23 James, *Writings*, 660.


25 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 156. There is a sense in which Foucault does think our institutions are fragile and that this fragility is advantageous. But, at the same time, he also thinks that
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traditional institutions are resilient structures whose capacity to maintain themselves and co-opt their opponents is uncanny. Cf. John Dewey's, *Experience and Nature* (all references in this paper are to Later Works vol 1 [Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Press, 1981], 172, for his view regarding the fear of the conservative in the presence of thinking: "Every thinker [qua thinker] puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place." The only predictable outcome of genuine reflection is that "many objects, ends [or goals] and institutions [or constellations of practices] are doomed." Even so, Dewey as well as Foucault appreciated the tenacity and resiliency of traditional practices and institutions.


28 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 329. In response to the question "If everything is going badly, where do we make a start?" Foucault insists that "everything isn't going badly. In any case, we shouldn't confuse useful criticisms of things with repetitive jeremiads against people."

29 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 156.
30 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 35.
31 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 37.
32 Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Donald Bouchard, ed. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 385. There is a difference here between Dewey and Foucault worthy of being explored, namely, that between the recognition of a "we" prior to the exercise of suspicion and the formation of a "we" only after the questioning of who we are. The difference is in part between the recognition of community as fait, something given, and community as task, something achieved and (beyond any present actuality) to be achieved. Dewey is more disposed toward recognizing community as both a given and a task, whereas Foucault is skeptical of the given forms of human community. But the public in Dewey's sense is ever a problem unto itself, first and foremost, the problem of identifying itself. For Dewey no less than for Foucault, the question comes down to this, How do we renegotiate our identity in some historically defined present? The task of the genealogist is to open space for such renegotiations.

34 Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 208.
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44 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 224.
45 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 224.
46 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 225.
47 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 225.

50 Foucault, Foucault Reader, 45.
51 Foucault, Foucault Reader, 45.
52 Foucault, Foucault Reader, 45–46.
53 Bernstein, The New Constellation, 149.
54 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 225.
55 West, American Evasion of Philosophy, 225.
56 West argues that Foucault's effacement of human agency results from his attachment to a Kantian framework: Foucault's "Kantian questions lead him to downplay human agency, to limit the revisability of discourses and disciplines, and thereby to confine his attention to a specific set of operations of power, i.e., those linked to constituting subjects" (225).


59 In an interview conducted on April 25, 1984, Alessandro Fontana recollected a seminar of Foucault's in which (among others) Friedrich von Hayek and Richard von Mises were read. It seemed to the interviewer (Fontana) that Foucault was taking the detour through liberalism “in order to rediscover the individual beyond the mechanisms of power” (Politics/Philosophy/Culture, 50). He also noted that, at the time of the seminar, “people began to talk about a subject of practices.” Even so, he quickly added that: “It will come a surprise to nobody that people said several times: there is no subject in Foucault’s work. The subjects are always subject [always entrapped in the mechanisms of power], they are the point of application of normative techniques and disciplines, but they are never sovereign subjects.” In effect, Foucault rejects as his only two choices that of a completely sovereign subject on the one hand and that of a thoroughly subjugated subject on the power, an agent outside of the meshes of power or one so thoroughly enmeshed in these mechanisms as to be a powerless being (no agent at all). He insists that: “A distinction must be drawn here. In the first place, I do indeed believe that there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere [we might add a transcendent form of agency to be located nowhere]. I am very skeptical to this view of the subject and very hostile to it. I believe, on the contrary, that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more autonomous way, through practices of liberation, of liberty, as in Antiquity, on the basis of course, of a number of rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment” (Politics/Philosophy/
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Culture, 50–51).

60 I do not mean necessarily to imply that Foucault’s later thought contradicts his earlier thought or that there is little or no continuity between the earlier and later phases of is reflection. But for someone so resolutely committed to thinking differently, to detaching himself from previous positions and preoccupations in order to explore new questions and terrain, it should come as no surprise that there are numerous shifts in emphasis and concern.


63 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 184.

64 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 184.


68 William James, Pragmatism: The Classic Writings, H. Standish Thayer, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1970), 154–155. James says, “The individualized self ... is part of the world experienced. The world experienced (otherwise called the ‘field of consciousness’) comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest. Where the body is is ‘here’; when the body acts (or is acted upon) is ‘now’; what the body touches (or is touched by) is ‘this’; all other things are ‘there’ and ‘then’ and ‘that.’ These words of emphasized position imply a systematization of things with reference to a focus of action and interest which lies in the body ... The body is the storm centre, the origin of co-ordinates, the constant place of stress in all that experience-train. Everything circles around it, and is felt from its point of view.” “The word ‘I’, then, is primarily a noun of position, just like ‘this’ and ‘here’.”

69 Dewey, Individualism Old and New, 121; emphasis added.

70 Dewey, Individualism Old and New, 121; emphasis added.

71 Dewey, Individualism Old and New, 121; emphasis added.

72 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signs (Paris: Librairie Gallimard). All references to this paper are to Signs, the English translation by Richard C. McCleary. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 154. Merleau-Ponty suggests that: “There are at bottom only two ideas of subjectivity—that of empty, unfettered, and universal subjectivity, and that of full subjectivity sucked down into the world. ...”

73 Foucault, Politics / Philosophy / Culture, 37.

74 Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, 190.

75 Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, 43.

76 Foucault, Politics / Philosophy / Culture, 258. Also see Charles Scott, On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Ethics and Politics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 10, 19.

77 There is of course nothing novel in this criticism. In fact, this

78 Bernstein, *New Constellations*, 144; 318.
80 Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 209; emphasis added.
81 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 265.
82 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 326.
83 Bernstein, *New Constellations*, Chap. 5
86 Philp, “Michel Foucault,” 80.
87 Philp, “Michel Foucault,” 80.
89 Dewey, *Individualism Old and New*, 122. The essay from which these two texts are taken is perhaps Emerson’s most famous writing, “Self-Reliance.” The way the first passage appears in Emerson’s own essay is slightly different from Dewey’s quotation of it: “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members” (in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Selected Essays*, Larzer Ziff, ed. (New York: Penguin Library, 1982), 178). The other passage opens with one of Emerson’s most famous imperatives: “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, etc.” (177).
91 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 155.
95 James, *Moral Equivalent of War*, 23.
96 Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 3ff. Also see Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie* (Librairie Plon). All references to this paper are to *Madness and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1965), xvi. The English translation by Richard Howard.
97 In an interview in 1983, Foucault stressed that: “... I speak from my personal experience. I know that knowledge can transform us, that
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truth is not only a way of deciphering the world (and maybe what we call truth doesn't decipher anything) but that if I know the truth I will be changed...

"You see, that's why I really work like a dog, etc." (Foucault, *Politics/Philosophy/Culture*, 14).

98 It is appropriate to recall here what C. S. Peirce advised, in his lectures on Pragmatism: A "bit of fun helps thought and tends to keep it pragmatical" (vol 5, paragraph 71).