Michel Foucault's History of the Present: Metatheoretical, Political, and Methodological Implications for a Historical Sociology

by

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PART I

I. Introduction: The Crisis in Historical Study

This essay examines the work of Michel Foucault, including its Nietzschean foundations, and more specifically, Foucault's theory of history, with a twofold aim. First, to address the crisis in historical scholarship associated with the anti-historicist tendencies occasioned by the postmodern turn in social science and philosophy. Second, to contrast the postmodern formulation of a "discontinuous history," as articulated by Foucault and other postmodern/poststructuralist writers with the more conventional treatment of historical consciousness, while seeking to rescue the latter via a synthetic integration of the two positions.

The case is made for a conception of historical understanding still anchored to the premise of the continuity of historical events, a conception which, though still basically couched in the traditional Hegelian model of history, reworks the idea of teleological determinism in the understanding of the unfolding of historical events. What is involved is an exploration of how a synthetic fusion of elements of continuous and discontinuous history may be useful in helping the model of continuous history avoid some of the more serious pitfalls associated with it, and thereby enhancing its critical and emancipatory potential. The elaboration of an integrative model that integrates basic aspects of continuous and discontinuous history restates the continuing value of historical understanding for human collective life.

Beginning three decades ago with the intensification of the trend that came to be known as postmodernism in Western

scholarship and culture, traditional historiography, understood primarily as a field of narrative writing, entered a period of crisis, a time when its basic premises and organizing principles were increasingly challenged, and its methods looked on with ever more suspicion. The work of French intellectuals had much to do with this upheaval in the writing of history, and a principal, if not *the* principal, force behind it was Michel Foucault. Until his untimely death in the summer of 1984, Foucault remained a dynamically and disturbingly innovative and iconoclastic force in French – and more broadly, European and neo-European – intellectual life. His larger theoretical project amounted to the formulation of a new map of cultural history, it called for a radical reconstruction of the very canon of the historical craft. Ironically, Foucault's attack on conventional historiography had the effect of rekindling an interest and preoccupation with the historical dimension of human studies, and brought about a concerted effort on the part of historians to rethink and revitalize their bases of operation, both theoretically and methodologically.

Foucault's historiographical model seems to have influenced the analysis of human events at its most fundamental level, specifically, that of the subject-object relationship. The subject-object problematic concerns Foucault's argument that the traditional role of the historian is closely bound up with the exercise of power and domination vis-a-vis the object of study. Within the context of traditional historiography and the idea of a "continuous" history, as, for instance, in the case of Marxist history, the historian-qua-interpreter and articulator of truth occupies a position of control over his/her objects of study, a position that is couched in the cognitive grasp of the historical sequence of events that led up to the present conditions. In appropriating and proclaiming the truth of historical events, the historian wrests it away from the hands of those who are the architects of the movement towards social emancipation (in this case, the working class), and who therefore should be the ones articulating this truth (see, e.g., Poster, 1984:77)

Historical modes of explanation have been articulated through a diversity of approaches (see, e.g., Hutton, 1981), such as:

(a) The "Great Men" paradigm, as expressed in conventional narrative political history.

(b) The more interdisciplinary, non-teleological, materialist, mainline "Annales" tradition of France (e.g., the work of Fernand Braudel). This paradigm is not oriented toward the political economy of events as the basis of historical analysis and understanding. Its emphasis on historical continuity is not directed towards the social, economic, or political concreticity and specificity of the events themselves, but to long-term series of objective structures – the "deep structures" of historical reality – which encase, undergird, and shape the historical events. This position may be regarded as non-teleological as it is not teleological in the conventional sense since it opposes traditional narrative historiography for being anchored to a subjectively-constructed teleology, whereby particular events, such as important political events, are singled out as "landmarks" of a necessary historical progression. From this standpoint, the practice of periodization is seen fundamentally as a subjectively produced "contrivance", an artificial element that serves only to mark the succession of events themselves, but is useless for identifying and tracing the *structural patterns* of the series of events (Hutton, 1981:240).

(c) The orientation that grew out of, but away from, the Annales historiographical tradition, namely, the "history of mentalities" school may be referred to as culturalist or *idealist* inasmuch as, in a *populist* sense, it focuses on the patterns of attitudes and thinking of ordinary people towards the elements of everyday life – a structuralist idealism. This specifically involves the examination of the interconnections and mutual influence between the structure of thinking and interpreting of individuals ("the mental horizon of an age") and the "environmental, institutional, and linguistic forms" which lend structure to and set conceptual boundaries around the mental world of individuals.

(d) Lucien Goldmann's genetic-structuralist history, which, in contrast to the history-of-mentalities orientati on, may be said to have an elitist strain insofar as it focuses on the worldviews of the ruling classes of the society.

(e) The older, established "idealist" school, exemplified by the German neo-idealist school of historiography of the late 1800s and early 1900s, which had as leading representatives scholars like Ranke, Meinecke, Burckhardt, Dilthey, and Rickert. German idealist social thought was predicated on a fundamental distinction between *naturwissenschaft* (natural science) and the *geisteswissenschaften* (the cultural sciences).

(f) The Marxist historiographical school. Areas of commonality have been identified between Foucault and the (mostly structuralist) work of the French historiographical paradigms. Hutton (1981), for example, points to a number of these common aspects: (a) Foucault tries to identify "common codes of knowledge" (which he calls *discourses*) as the main context where the pattern of collective attitudes is to be found; (b) Foucault denounces the idea of linearity and continuity in the unfolding of history; and, finally, (c) Foucault extracts the meaning of historical situations from the structural configuration of the discourses, not from subjective interpretation. Yet, if the parallelism between Foucault and the more mainstream historiographical models is thrown into relief, their larger dissimilarity assumes greater importance, particularly with respect to the question of *meaning*. Whereas the other historical approaches rest on a conception of meaning grounded in the correspondence between discourse and meaning, Foucault inveighs against the notion of continuity of meaning in the making of Western civilization (Hutton, 1981:254).

Thus, in light of these considerations it is reasonable to set Foucault's position apart from the others. His work does not form a self-contained system. Strictly speaking, he does not have a full-blown theory of history, a finished project, such as Marxism or Freudianism (Sheridan, 1982:225). Marx and Freud elaborated unified, totalizing theories of society which have been characterized and spurned by postmodern writers (e.g., Lyotard,

1984) as *metanarratives*, for their reliance on specific universal truth-claims, and their implications of closedness, exclusiveness, and authoritarianism. Marxism, for example, reduces the entire discussion of social power to the level of *class*, that is, Marx sees the exercise of power as emanating from the relations of inequality between the producing and working classes, thus subordinating every form of group oppression and power inequality to class-based inequality (as opposed to considering the existence of power in terms of non-class formations such as bureaucracy or technocracy). The attempt to classify Foucault's work as logocentric – that is, a work that makes claims to legitimacy on the basis of external, universally truthful propositions – and globalizing is contradicted, by his own admission and the evaluation of others (e.g. Sheridan, 1982; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; see, however, Derrida's argument to the contrary, in Megill, 1979), by the essentially fluid, dynamically-evolving character of his theories. In this connection, if one were to identify any distinguishing central feature of his work, it would have to be his iconoclastic attitude towards established intellectual currents, old and new, towards philosophy itself. In specific terms, Foucault's intellectual trajectory was always marked by *breaks*: a break from the earlier influences of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and existentialism (Sartre), both of which give primacy to the subject as a source of meaning. [1] For a while, Marxism held a greater appeal to him, mainly because it de-anthropologized the historical subject and made it a collective one. But the teleological premises of Marxism, its attempt to formulate a total history, led to yet another break. When linguistically-based structuralism, with its rejection of 19th century historicism and subjectivism, came into its own in France in the early 1960s, Foucault aligned himself with it because of its distaste for the "philosophy of the subject," and for a *continuous* history based on causality, teleology, and contradiction. The latter expresses the Hegelian dialectical model of history. [2] But he eventually broke away from structuralism too because of the latter's association with scientistic notions of truth and objectivity

(Sheridan, 1982:204). Above all, the iconoclastic, *deconstructionist* thrust of Foucault's work must be stressed. This is what imparts to him the quality of a "slayer of dragons, a breaker of systems" (Sheridan, 1982:225).

In any event, insofar as one can *freeze* Foucault's project and attach formal classificatory schemes to it, his early work falls into the general camp of structuralism. In the last decade of his life, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, it veered towards a "genealogy", *a la* Nietzsche. Some writers have even cast him as a historian of mentalities.

II. The History of Mentalities

This school of historiography is a relatively recent ramification of the larger *Annales* paradigm. It departs, however, from the more orthodox version of this paradigm because it is not so directly linked to the exploration of economic and social history, but devotes more attention to cultural aspects, specifically, to the "structures of mind" of the everyday individual. Idealist-structuralist historiography also exhibits a culturalist focus, but in a more elitist fashion, since it directs its attention to the world-view of the ruling social classes as a reflection of a period, not to the ideas of the ordinary citizenry. The idea of the "everyday individual" is an important aspect here in that it gives this orientation a sort of a *populist* tone, where the mode of thought studied is that of the population at large, not that of the outstanding thinkers of a given epoch. The focus then might be said to be on the *collective representations* of the society (Durkheim). Historians of mentalities, stress the principle of continuity in the analysis of historical events, but in a way that distinguishes them from the more traditional teleological conception of history: they stress the way in which mental structures, accumulated through the civilizing process, both channel and constrain human creative activity. Put differently, theirs is the study of the collective effort of individuals to "establish an equilibrium between [their] need to give new forms of meaning to [their] experience and [their] desire to cling to existing forms in which conventional wisdom lies" (Hutton,

Foucault as a historian of mentalities problematic right from the outset. First, in spite of the fact that the historians of mentalities adopt a particular brand of teleology by means of which the past is analyzed in terms of sequentially arranged structural configurations, and not in terms of concrete events occurring in sequence, this still clashes with Foucault's systematic opposition to teleology and evolution. Second, the history-of-mentalities school analyzes mental structures by following the method of synchronic structuralism. Hutton not only links Foucault's work with structuralism, but also singles it out for being particularly "thoroughgoing" in its use of this method. The untenability of this position is apparent when we consider Foucault's emphatic disavowal of structuralism since the late 1960s.[3] Third, to the extent that human creative action is given both form and guidance by structures of various sorts (i.e., social, political, religious, linguistic), and this represents a *thesis*; that these structures concomitantly act as constraints upon this action, and this represents the *antithesis*; that individuals search for the "boundary" between the structured and non-structured and non-structured spheres of action, and this represents the *synthesis* - we end up with a conception of cultural history whereby history unfolds in accordance with a "logic of contradictions," in a manner paralleling the dialectics of Marx's historical materialism, precisely the framework against which Foucault has consistently railed in his genealogy (see, e.g. Gordon, 1980:114).

The emphasis on anonymous structures and on a developmental (Piagetian) conception of historical reality is central to the *modus operandi* of the historian of mentalities. Phillipe Ariés's work exemplifies the study of the developmental stages of mentality and civilization (Hutton, 1981).[4] This approach is strongly suggestive of an ideological bias towards certain stages, those in which "sociability and personalism" are fostered, as opposed to the atomization of the modern industrial era. It also presents us with a theory of civilization and a critique of the modern era which show what the modern individual has come to identify as progress has not come about without "pronounced psychological discipline," and that the

distant past was the time when human inventiveness was at its most spontaneous and unrestrained (Hutton, 1981:258). If this is so, the implication of this position, that is, its nostalgic longing for the past, immediately separates it from Foucault who has nothing of the "antiquarian" in his approach. As Sheridan puts it (1982:195), his passion is "to seek out the new, that which is coming to birth in the present."

One last problem to be examined is that of meaning. For the historian of mentalities, human discourses provide a key to meaning. In plotting the succession of discourses and the trajectory of meaning across historical epochs, he/she is able to discern "the direction in which civilization is tending", to chart the flow of history. In this task, the historian of mentalities adheres to strategies of "deep interpretation", as can be gathered from Hutton's discussion (1981:252), and this is a procedure with which Foucault, again, takes issue (see, e.g, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx", Cahiers du Royaumont, 1967). He does not believe discourses are to be subjectively interpreted by the analyst, but rather, placed or "mapped" upon the historical landscape. Notwithstanding these methodological and epistemological divergences between Foucault and this school of historical study, he has occasionally been classified as a member of the latter.

III. Foucault and Structuralism

Before we explore Foucault's history of the present in more detail, his posture vis-a-vis structuralism should be briefly reviewed. His earlier works (e.g. *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*) exhibited definite commonalities with the structuralist movement. An example is a metaphorics of vision and space (Megill, 1979:491-492), such as the element of "the gaze," which Foucault explores as a mechanism of apprehension of the Other – hence, of domination and control. The case here (i.e., in Foucault's analysis) is that of *le regard medical*, or the (problem of the institutionalization of the) medical gaze (i.e., the process by which medical patients are subjected to systematic, centralized observation and inspection), which he considered to be operative in the circumstances studied in *The Birth of the*

Clinic; or, in similar fashion, that of the gaze as a mechanism of surveillance and control in the context of the penal system. A metaphorics of space was concomitantly emphasized by Foucault in these early studies of social domination within the medical and penal systems, insofar as these studies explored the possibilities of social control and political organization afforded by the architectural design of Bentham's *Panopticon* (see Foucault, 1980:146-65). Other general parallels may be drawn. Linguistically-based (Saussurian) structuralism concentrates on language (*langue*), rather than the human speaker; Foucault attacks subjectivism and anthropologism regarding the historical subject. Strucuralism takes a synchronic, rather than diachronic, view of history; Foucault concentrates on historical discontinuity, rather than continuity. Structuralism focuses on the concept of the sign; Foucault shows a "pervasive interest in signs and permutations" (Megill, 1979:460-461). On the other hand, Foucault's interest in and use of language differ from the structuralist approach. As he himself says, "I am not greatly interested in the formal possibilities presented by a system such as language" (*Les Lettres Francaises*, n. 1187, 1971). This position is evidenced in his attack on the primacy of the signifier in structuralist literature. In rejecting subjectivism and the anthropologization of the historical subject, Foucault is also far more indebted to Nietzsche than to Saussure, according to Megill (1979:462). And his interest in discontinuity derives from his rejection of subjectivism, rather than from a fundamental attachment to a synchronic conception of history. "Continuous history," he says (1972:12), "is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject."

An interesting aspect that further sets Foucault's theoretical enterprise from structuralism may be detected between the Appolonian and Dyonisian cultural ideals (Nietzsche elaborates this distinction in his *The Birth of Tragedy, 1967*). The Apollonian ideal stands for rationality, formalism, moderation, lucidity, and scientism, while the Dionysian ideal glorifies the elements of irrationality, revelry, and "mystical jubilation." As Megill states it, "the Apollonian spirit teaches the

acceptance and retention of forms, while the Dionysian spirit teaches their destruction and re-creation." (1979:471). Another commentator (Miller, 1993:67) writes about "the Appolonian propensity to shape the world with forms of just and pleasing proportion; and the Dionysian tendency to shatter such forms and violently transgress the boundaries between the conscious and unconscious, reason and unreason." Structuralism of Saussurian (i.e., linguistic) derivation has been said to be fundamentally governed by the Apollonian ideal. The larger movement of modern structuralism, in fact, has been depicted as "the most recent manifestation of the persistent Appollonianism of Western philosophy" (Megill, 1979: 474). Foucault's earlier formal treatment of discursive practices was consistent with the Apollonian model. The philosopher Jacques Derrida argued in an important essay of the late 1960s (cited and analyzed in Megill, 1979:470-76) that Foucault's early works are anchored to a structuralism that is strongly permeated with Apollonian tendencies. (If this be granted, there is an element of irony here insofar as this structuralism does not so much refute as endorse the very "logocentric" tendencies it is intended to attack – see Megill, 1979 on this point). By the early 1980s, however, Foucault appeared to be guiding his theoretical project increasingly in the direction of the Dyonisian ideal, which frontally opposes what Derrida has called the "logocentrism" of Western thought.

IV. The History of the Present: Nietzsche and Foucault

As Foucault's theoretical interests began to shift away from discourse in the late 1960's he called his historiography a "genealogy" (as opposed to his earlier "archaeology"), borrowing from Friedrich Nietzsche both the term and theoretical inspiration. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982:105), the genealogist "is a diagnostician who concentrates on the relations of power, knowledge, and the body in modern society". Our specific interest here is not so much with the aspect and discussion of power as with the way the incorporation of

Nietzsche's genealogy has affected Foucault's conception of history.

Before considering Foucault's incorporation of the Nietzschean reconstructed model of historiography, we should look at Nietzsche more directly. His work represents a significant turning point in historiographical writing since the Enlightenment (White, 1993:331), inasmuch as "he rejected the categories of historical analysis which historians had used since the 1830s, and denied the reality of any such thing as *a* historical process [i.e., a single, unified historical process] upon which these categories could be turned." Nietzsche's historiographical writings were thus not only reconstructive, but also *deconstructive* in the postmodern sense of a fundamental demolition and recasting of the bases of meaning of this concept. In this connection, White (1993:332) continues, "Nietzsche's purpose was to destroy belief in a historical past from which men might learn any single, substantial truth. For him...there were as many 'truths' about the past as there were individual perspectives on it." Prevailing intellectual trends of the late 1800s – principal among which, for our purposes, the rise of Positivist science, and the influence of Symbolism in the arts, literature, and philosophy – fueled Nietzsche's reconceptualization of history on the basis of a pervasive nihilism, and of the awareness of "the ultimately constructivist nature of any form, meaning, or context which men seemed to have found in the world" (White, 1993:332). (It may be noted, in this regard, that the implicit relativism of this view became one of the more salient features of postmodern social and philosophical theory in the second half of the twentieth century). At the same time, the antihistoricist tendency in Nietzsche also apparently drew impetus from a more optimistic "desire for a rebirth of heroism", a refusal to cave in to what he perceived as the generalized complacency, naivete, mediocrity, linguistic mystifications, of the period, and which traditional historical consciousness was guilty of perpetuating (White, 1993:334-36).

The Nietzschean stance of hostility towards the "historical imagination" was widely embraced by early 20th-century intellectuals, a phenomenon that may be seen as a

consequence of the generalized pessimism exhibited by the *intelligentsia* of the time towards the unfolding social and political events – the beginning of a new century, with all of its attendant symbolic implications, fast-expanding industrialization and modernization, the "Great War" (i.e., World War I).

By the first quarter of the twentieth century the Western intellectual community appeared to be mounting a formidable opposition to the idea of the usefulness of the historical consciousness towards averting disasters and creating a just social order. This was amply evidenced in the arts, literature, philosophy, and social science–for instance, André Gide's *The Immoralist*, Ortega y Gasset's *The Modern Theme* – in terms of an opposition to History as the "worship of the dead past," as an antiquarian pursuit, an "obsessive concern with dead cultures and dead forms of life." Insofar as it was rooted in Nietzsche, this attitude was a ramification of his larger stance against rationalism, which translated into the attack on traditional morality, that in turn being necessarily grounded in history. The anti-historicist tendency was strengthened by the widespread disillusionment with the totalitarian tendencies afflicting Western Europe in the early 1900s, which culminated in the First World War, and continued over the next couple of decades. The consciousness of the past had not produced sufficient motivation in individuals to *learn* from the past and avert the conflict.

The antihistoricist impulse may be identified, as noted, in relation to several aspects making up the larger sociohistorical milieu of *fin-de-siécle* Western Europe. White (1993:45-8) calls attention to the burgeoning "realism" of the time, a manifestation of the rise of scientificism in the various fields of knowledge, which called for an apprehension of things as "they really were," meaning, in terms of the more immediate, tangible, empirically measurable aspects of these things. This stipulation was seen as a particularly difficult one to conform to for the student of history. The historical consciousness, in other words, the effort to understand, interpret, and gain insight from the historical world – because it was itself encased within the flow of history and, therefore, conditioned by the arrangements, events,

worldview of the period, could not be as precise and reliable as the scientific consciousness, exercised by practitioners in the natural sciences. As such, the historical consciousness was inherently flawed, impaired by the fact it could not be a transcendental consciousness understood here in terms of the ability to overcome the determinations of the historical space within which it functioned. Thus, it was unable to grant the historical investigator the ability to reach the "truth" about the past that early Enlightenment thinkers (e.g., Pierre Bayle, cited in White, 1993:49) were seeking.

However, the seeds of intellectual skepticism regarding the potentialities of historical study for enlightenment reach back to the earlier phases of the evolution of social and philosophical theory, to what White (1993:31-80) discussed as the *Ironic* tendencies of the worldview of the early Enlightenment (which will reappear later, in Nietzsche). The *philosophes* wished to couch the interpretations of the past in Reason, in *critical* (i.e., rational or metahistorical) discourse. However, the scientific consciousness that undergirded their worldview – and, more to our interest, their philosophy of history – spawned a strain of skepticism that militated against their appreciation of the past as a reliable source of wisdom, a context of instruction and enlightenment; it militated against language itself, as a potentially viable medium for apprehending and articulating historical truth. This all came to question the very sacrosanct Enlightenment conception of history as the inexorable march of collective life towards ever greater Progress. Because the application of the scientific principle of cause-and-effect to the interpretation of historical events and change ultimately renders history a field of contingency – hence, of irrationality, in the degree that these events would not therefore be products of the conscious agency of individuals, but rather, of the perenially contending forces of Reason and Unreason – the Enlightenment philosophers were unavoidable impelled to characterize historical explanation as an aesthetic or artistic, rather than scientific or rational, endeavor. The normative and moral implications of this aesthetic or artistic conception of history and historical study were that History

"taught no general truths at all." If it yielded any fundamental impression at all was the nihilistic idea that nothing ever changes (White, 1993:65-68).

By the middle of the present century the anti-historicist impulse came to appear in Existentialism, a social philosophy that also drew strength and inspiration from the thought of Nietzsche. The discussion of Sartre in White (1966:122-3) seems to suggest a psychoanalytic conception of history portrays the past as an imperial force, working to shape individuals, hence, collectivities and collective patterns of action, and by further implication, social arrangements – at the *unconscious* level. It is not even that the past is there, readily available for conscious retrieval and utilization (i.e., as in "learning the lessons from the past"); rather, its effect goes on without being interfered with by human conscious control.

Existentialism [5] is a mode of (continual) transcendence and in accordance with this aspect Sartrean existentialism, stresses this "expansion into an indefinitely open future", where human subjects are free and autonomous, and not bound by determinations rooted in the past. The past – the idea of continuous history – is therefore rejected for being a source of authoritarian control of human beings, imprisoning them in immanence, dooming them to immanence, to the extent their present existence is maintained, stabilized, crystallized, and legitimized – in other words, made logicaliy and teleologically necessary – on the basis of a past sequence of events, on the basis of tradition.

The Nietzschean position has been introduced here in a way that throws into relief its deep humanism (see, e.g., White, 1966). This may be evidenced in the idea of the *Ubermensch* (the *Overman*), Nietzsche's concept for the cultural ideal that integrates Reason and Passion, and stands for the stage of actualization of the Nietzschean *will to power*. Nietzschean humanism became a driving force of (Sartrean) existentialism. Its fundamental stance is that of rejection of conventional morality, of Reason. (Essentially, the *immoralist* quality associated with Nietzsche's position refers only to his iconoclastic, rejecting

posture towards culturally-defined and prescribed morality. From this perspective, Nietzsche sees himself as more of a moralist than those who abide by conventional morality, just as the atheist may claim greater spirituality vis-a-vis those are affiliated with organized religion). Nietzsche *deconstructs* or critically re-examines the foundational aspects of Western life and philosophy, especially those associated with Western rationalism, such as traditional philosophy and the traditional philosophical writing style. In this regard, his critique of language focused on aspects of linuigstic objectification and apprehension of the world. The latter is deemed inadequate, false; it fails to capture "what is true in things." (Nietzsche, cited in Woelfel, 1989:124). He attacked organized religion as the supreme context of mystification of reality, and of repression of the life-affirming tendencies of individuals. The *will to power* demythologizes all of these aspects. The will to power is actualized in the *Ubermensch (Overman)*, the ideal wherein Reason and Passion, Apollonian and Dionysian forces and tendencies, are integrated. The actualization of the *Overman* principle consists in the recognition of the world of experience as a Dionysian world – that is, a world where equilibrium and purpose are to be drawn not from aspects of linearity, precision, and predictability, but from an eternal *va-et-vient* of contradicting forces, "...a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back..." We are urged, therefore, "to stand in a Dionysian relation to existence" (Nietzsche, cited in Schacht, 1975:15). Yet, despite his insistence that modern life was to bring about the equilibrium between the opposing Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies, it has been indicated (Woelfel, 1989:124) that in his later writings Nietzsche saw the Dionysian ideal "as the sole symbol of that self-overcoming through the integration of Reason and Passion in creative activity which epitomized the human will to power;" and that, furthermore, he even pointed to the arrangements of the cosmos as strong evidence against the idea of a continuous and teleological history (i.e., in the sense that the cyclical nature of the evolution of the universe, of the unfolding of cosmic events,

implies the corresponding cyclical pattern of history, and the need for history to be understood in this way).

The problem of history as such is being treated here in terms of our relationship to the past, which means it has directly to do with the study of the past *as an end in itself* (the problem is thus construed in terms of this *antiquarian* posture assume in relation to the past). The focus is on how the utilization of the past does not generate fruitful perspectives on the present (White, 1966:124).

The 19th century was the time when historical consciousness reached a peak, as it unfolded in a context of post-Kantian idealism. The historical consciousness functioned in a mediative capacity, a mediating force, integrating artistic ("romantic") and scientific ("positivistic") scholarship. It functioned therefore as the very "organizing category", the very backbone, of scholarly work (White, 1966:125). However, the problem of history, or the question of whether or not the past is useful for individuals in terms of enabling them to function more proficiently in the present, is one linked to the workings of socio-political conservatism (White, 1966:126-7). As recently as the 1960s, historians were seen to be still attached to 19th-century understandings and definitions of "what art, science, and philosophy ought to be" (White, 1966). This was evidently problematic in light of our revamped understanding and treatment of physical science since Einstein, and of social science, since Weber. The utilization of the past must therefore be selective, so as to accord with the requirements of the present.

It must be kept in mind that this discussion centers on the way in which legitimation may still be provided to the process of historical study itself, though not necessarily to the model of continuous and teleological, traditional history. In fact, it appears the solution to the "problem of history" is to be found in a departure from the antiquated 19th-century dualistic historical treatment of art and science, which means it is to be found precisely in innovative approaches to historical investigation. The example provided (in White, 1966:129) of how this can be accomplished is a reference to N. Brown, who

presumably follows "a line of investigation suggested by Nietzsche...", suggesting the deconstructive bent of Nietzsche's historiography must not be entirely discarded, as modern historians seek out more productive ways of relating to the past.

The convergence between Nietzsche and Foucault lies mainly in their rejection, on the one hand, of a teleological, "totalizing" history, that is, a history which starts at some primordial, ontological source (*Ursprung*), becomes cumulative and progresses towards a finality or telos; and, on the other hand, of depth interpretation and hidden meanings. Meaning is to be apprehended in the "surface practices." To seek to interpret phenomena at a deep level is merely to discover previously imposed interpretations on the object, to lay bare sedimentations. Instead of that, genealogy "records the history of these interpretations." From this perspective, Foucault launches the brunt of his attack on Marxist historicism, which is grounded on dialectics, causality, and teleology, and, additionally, treats facts with contempt, while seeking for "meaning, purpose, for the truth beneath" these facts (Sheridan, 1982:217). Apparently what is involved here is Marxism's perversion of its own material focus: despite its claims to ownership of the proper materialist interpretation of reality, and its unabashed, unqualified rejection of idealism, Marxsim is still ensnared in metaphysics, it still enforces an ideological (hence, idealist) metaphysics of reality, of historical events ("the truth beneath"?). In this way, Marxism ultimately remains a philosophy, in the sense of interpretation *qua* ideologically-authoritarian practice. In the capacity of *philosophy*, it ends up, ironically, exhibiting the negative aspect of an idealist inability to reach the world. What Foucault would seem to be opposing here is the "ideological" thrust of Marxism, and the latter's attempt to integrate its historical vision, to achieve a great synthesis, on the basis of its proletarian creed. For all of Marx's preoccupation with ridding his theory of Hegelian idealism and guiding it toward a materialist grasp of the world, Marx's ideas, particularly as treated and implemented in the Soviet model of a socialist order that emerged after 1917, degenerated into a crass idealist rejection of the fact. In

contradistinction, Foucault is very much concerned with "facticity", to the point where critics have labelled him a "happy positivist." (This characterization holds only in this very particular sense, not in the sense of conventional or ordinary references to positivism's hypostatization of facticity.)

As noted earlier, Foucault's apprehension of the historical phenomenon is based on an opposition to depth interpretation, of the kind present in Marx (also in Gadamer, Freud, etc.). In its non-structuralist versions, Marxism interpretation may be seen as "subjective," or what it is still anchored to a metaphysics of the Subject, of Consciousness, in the tradition of philosophical inquiry reaching back to Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. Foucault argues in this connection that Marxist interpretation robs reality, the "given world," of its essential attributes, which is to say, it departs from what "is," and that is because the interpreter never believes things to be what they are externally (Sheridan, 1982:221).[6] The Marxist interpreter takes on the character of an "excavator" (Foucault, 1967a). For Foucault, interpretation is a device of distortion and power; of "reduction, repression, obliteration of fact, discourse, and desire" (Sheridan, 1982:221). [7]

The aim of Foucault's genealogical history in its relationship to the past is not to seek the thread of continuity that makes sense of present conditions - "the search for descent is not the erecting of foundations" (Foucault, 1977:147); rather, it is to trace a map of dispersion and discontinuity. It does not carry any sense of destiny. Truth is not at the origin of events ("at the root of what we know"), but in their exteriority. This is the principle in Nietzsche's genealogy referred to as "descent," a rather complex analytical procedure through which the past becomes demarcated at points of rupture and renewal. Human reality perishes and is born again, Phoenix-like, at each breaking point. Foucault speaks of these specific historical moments as "emergences" (1977:148) that are guided by *enstehung*, defined here as "the principle and the singular law of an apparition." Moreover, this principle does not denote so much a sense of finality or "culmination" in the historical process, as "current

episodes in a series of subjugations."

The Foucauldian position, in echoing Nietzsche, aims at demonstrating the "foreignness of the past" so as to "undercut the legitimacy of the present" (Poster, 1984:74). This approach undermines the tendency of traditional historians to rely on, and stress, what they see as the thread of continuity between the past and present, thus averting the characterization of the present as a mere function of the past, which would amount to a functionalist explanation (hence, justification) of present circumstances. By stripping the present of its association with the past, the contingency of the present is emphasized, that is, the analysis shows there is no need to presuppose necessity or determinism in existing arrangements and practices, to think, as Foucault asserts it, that "because this is, that will be" (in Kritzmann, 1988:37). This position acts as a deterrent to authoritarian determinism in accounting for the historical unfolding of events, and to the common tendency to reify existing social formations, and thus oppose "the living openness of history" (Foucault, 1972:13). It stresses the realization that events always have what we might term provisional or probationary validity, therefore, leading back to the point in and of itself that-which-is does not unavoidably determine that-which-will-be. The contingent nature of social action is thus reaffirmed here, insofar as it occurs on the basis of fortuitous social arrangements, which form "during the course of a precarious and fragile history" (Kritzman, 1988:37). In this connection, Foucault specifically proposes the de-centering of the Subject, in the context of his attack on subjectivist, teleological history and its implications of rationalist authoritarianism and his effort to purge historical analysis of all "anthropologism."

The absence of the historical subject is shown clearly in the context of the Nietzschean "emergence." In Nietzsche's discussion of good and evil, the emergence takes place not in association with one human faction or another, but appears in a nebulous, imprecise *non-space* in which the "endlessly repeated play of dominations" occurs (Foucault, 1977:150). Power

relationships are timeless and universal; what changes are the specific rituals and "meticulous procedures," endlessly repeated through history, and by way of which power and domination are manifested. This is not a closed scenario, like the Marxian universe in which polar opposites clash, and "emergences" are attributed more directly to victors and victories. At this point, the implications of the de-anthropologization of the historical subject can be discerned, at least in its more immediate aspect, namely, the fact that the assignment of historical responsibility to a play of abstract forces which operate "in the interstice" between congeries of human action, certainly imparts a structuralist dimension to this conception of history. It also draws responsibility away from the human subject (the latter is an area of contention between Foucault and the existentialists, who, Foucault believes, carry the matter of personal responsibility to extremes), whether that subject be collective or individual, and whether history is treated as a continuous or discontinuous process. At the same time, Foucault (1977:151) suggests that while systems of rules of domination underlie historical transformations, "the success of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules." An element of voluntarism is to be detected here, apparently at odds with the idea of the anonymous historical subject, and with the assumption that autonomous discursive rules determine social practices.

The principle of counter-memory, which underlies Foucault's history of the present, parallels the anti-historicism of the structuralist camp. It is linked to the motion of discontinuity, which destroys traditional historical consciousness. The present has no links with the past, it is a separate phenomenon, spatially and temporally, from that which has preceded it. In this sense, it has no memory—metaphysical, ideological, or transcendental memory; no memory of human (anthropological) continuity. The present actually becomes the past, and takes over its functions, as far as the primary locus of interest of the investigator is concerned. The past itself becomes a vast terrain upon which the dispersions of human events are simply mapped out. It is no longer "recognition;" hence, the implications for a loss of

memory, or for the entire Foucaultian historiography to take on the dimensions of a "counter-memory." This process has been seen by one writer (White, 1973:26) as the Proustian idea in reverse: a *disremembrance* of things past.

The present as past becomes a perspectival phenomenon because of its uniqueness and independence; but this perspectival quality amounts to a rejection of historical reality itself (Megill,1979:497). This problem may also be addressed in the context of interpretation and the interpretative choices of the historian. Historical reality presents an infinity of interpretative possibilities, and the historian selects a given historical moment arbitrarily, "in the hope of accommodating the reality to the needs and interests of the continuing present" (Megill, 1979:498). The problem—which is intrinsic to continuous history—is naturally that of delimiting the area in the past that is to be the object of investigation. Foucault's neo-Nietzschean solution is an anti-historical one: the rejection of history itself. Historical reality takes form, meaning, substance, only because of "present needs and interests;" thus, it is a projection of these needs and interests, almost an object of caprice.

The establishment of a history of the present entails an attack against traditional or continuous history on two major levels: first, a continuous history is seen as a closed system in which all the "displacements of the past" are reconciled and reduced to a historical totality that is "fully closed upon itself." In this scheme of things, creativity is stifled in favor of "the laws of fidelity" (Foucault, 1977:162). Second, this history becomes suprahistorical, owing to the implications of (apocalyptic) finality that underpin it. With such a basis of judgement or ideology imparted to the historical sense, the latter becomes subject to the dictates of metaphysics (Foucault, 1977:152). Genealogy, on the other hand, refuses "the certainty of absolutes." History is composed and decomposed, with each break in the course of events. Individuals are construed and deconstrued. This is the reason why Foucault speaks of history as bringing about a destruction of the individual, which encompasses a destruction of the body (1977:148). In actuality, the body is not bound to its

own physiology in the absolute sense that we are normally led to understand; its properties are *built* historically and destroyed historically, with each transformation of reality. In Foucault's view, the same applies, of course, to the human psyche and ideology. He also speaks of genealogy as a liberating element: it liberates human history from suprahistorical impositions, that is to say, from teleological premises of finality and resolution, and leaves it to its own dispersive tendencies. It liberates history from the human subject, in a sense, for there is no longer an anthropological subject, only an anonymous one. It asserts the idiosyncratic nature of the event, its singularity. It keeps history from being dissolved "into an ideal continuity."

As for the subject, his/her autonomy may be real (this is never really clear) but circumscribed and short-lived. It operates within certain parameters, and it dies with each historical break, with the emergence of new systems of rules of domination. But this very historical treatment lays bare the source of the essential human freedom from "constants," to a degree that not even his body can be considered a constant, because, ultimately, the universe of dispersions and discontinuities in infinitely elastic. It is not bound by a suprahistorical standard that subjugates the infinitely diversified flow of history to a universal, unifying force. Thus it is that Foucault's history is, and can only be, a history of the present. He does not set out on his journey to the past searching for the magic thread that unites series of events, events combined dialectically in clusters (the Marxian dialectics) and carrying *meaning* across historical periods in order to finally deposit it in the structures of present-day existence. Instead, he embarks on the "descent" into the past in order to map out patterns of discontinuity, without any concern for origins, for causal progressions, for notions of finality, for impervious truths, for absolutes. As he puts it, the aim of the investigator in this journey is to "leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity" (1977:156). It is a journey which, despite this illuminative potentiality, may also bring much discomfort, mainly because on the broader level the individual feels more secure in

the nearness of universals and absolutes – truth, goodness, justice – in the awareness of tradition and continuity, in the experience of closure, in the feeling of historical identity. Foucault himself concedes an "effective" or genealogical history "deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millenial ending" (1977:154). The reference to the *effective* character of history is Foucault's appeal to a Nietzschean *wirkliche historie*, that is, history that is effective in terms of showing that the historical development of humankind is less the unfolding of noble motives and lofty quests than of frailties and vulnerabilities: the march of history reveals the self-destructive tendencies of human beings, embodied in their relentless thirst for knowledge and rational organization of life– *la volonte de savoir* – and the ever greater imperilment of human life engendered by the ceaseless pursuit of knowledge. From a Foucauldian standpoint, this might be interpreted as the ultimate existential "disrobing" of the self, the abandonment of all ideological crutches, the confrontation with truth, truth that is at once illuminating, in terms of revealing the true nature of history, namely, that of being a random, unregulated, capricious, and liberating process; and disquieting, in terms of removing from us the security of having a sense of historical continuity and purpose, of underlying meaning, of grand design.[8]

V. In Defense of Historical Consciousness

The political dimension of the debate is undeniable. To begin with, to subscribe to a conception of history based on rupture and discontinuity is to remind oneself of the fundamental relativity of things, because the element of historical sequentiality and necessity is removed. That is, events in this model do not occur on historical tracks, on which they link up with one another in structural series, which then result inevitably into other particular configurations, with each series being the necessary outcome of preceding ones. Thus, from this standpoint of historical discontinuity, when one perceives the dawn of a new historical epoch, one not only perceives the threshold of a new

era, but also the limits of one's own. One sees the promise of what is to come, and the finitude of all that the present era stands for (Roth, 1981:44). And because there is no progression, what remains, along with a sense of impending "death of history" and "death of man," is the enhanced potential for judging reality critically. Furthermore, the presentation of power-as-repression can be detected in Foucault's criticism of continuous history. To the extent that a continuous history can be associated with the idea of progress, it suggests the ongoing development of a Weberian-type rationality, with its inevitable corollaries of ethical bias, as in the greater valuation of higher (vs. lower) levels of societal rationality, and domination, as in the oppression of forms of cultural life that do not conform to the Western idea of societal rationalization. It seems clear, therefore, that the decision to support a continuous or discontinuous model of history becomes, in the long run, a political decision. On the other hand, the reliance on the assumptions and principles underlying the idea of continuous history should not automatically and necessarily equate with social conservatism and ideological imperialism. Marxism and Critical Theory are philosophies that support the model of a continuous history; yet, it is from a Marxist or critical-theory perspective that theorists from various fields have launched their attack on liberal capitalism, the notion of progress/modernity, and the rise of rationalization.

The Nietzschean attack on history (as discussed, for instance, in White, 1966:116) may thus be reverted: the past need not bring despair towards the future, because it can be used – it can serve as a guide – towards the ongoing construction and reconstruction of present life. Historical reconstruction that is grounded on the premise of historical continuity may therefore be treated as valuable, from this point of view.

In relation to this, the polarization of discontinuous and continuous history must not necessarily limit us to a choice between a historical conception that is open, malleable, and ultimately liberating versus one that is confining and ridden with determinisms. We know, for example, that Marx's historical

materialism, the classical case of "totalizing" history, shuns linear determinism, despite its teleological basis. While it stresses the influence of the forces of production upon human action (e.g., Marx and Engels, 1978:124-5; 1981:20-21), it also stresses the reciprocal effect of human action on the economic system (e.g., the 3rd thesis on Feuerbach; also, Engels's letter to J. Bloch, in Marx and Engels, 1951, vol.II, p.443).

Other theoretical models predicated on the idea of continuous history may also be reviewed here, we may begin with Lucien Goldmann and his model of genetic structuralism. Working within the broader Marxist tradition, Goldmann elaborates a model of "genetic structuralism" which significantly enlarges upon our historical imagination by borrowing from Marx the epistemological and methodological device of the dialectic. The dialectic undergirds a genetic history in which the functional necessity of the historical object under investigation is located within a broader structure, within which the object fulfills a function (see, e.g., Goldmann, in Boelhower, 1980:88). And from Lukacs, in particular, Goldmann borrows the notion of *totality*, which pertains to the fact that a given object/fact can only be understood as the result of relations within the dialectical interaction between the whole and the parts. The key interpretive category in this schema is the *world view*, generated by plural ("transindividual") subjects, and of which there is only a limited number. By following the Marxian approach of exploring both the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of reality – the one dealing with processes provisionally "frozen" into formal models, the other, with processes of development or transformation – Goldmann demonstrates, first, the possibility of elaboration of a method that simultaneously takes into account continuity and discontinuity, and second, the untenability of a rigid dichotomization of models of history into continuous vs. discontinuous (in Boelhower, 1980:49-53; also, Bottomore, 1975:52).

An additional aspect may be considered. The world view, as manifested in the literary text, is expressive of, or to put it more accurately, "homologous" to, a particular *zeitgeist*. There

is, however, only a limited number of possible world views in history which means dominant ideologies come and go, in cyclical fashion. Goldmann, on the other hand, sees world views not as collective consciousnesses repeating themselves in unaltered form, but as cyclical reoccurrences of collective ways of thinking that *are conditioned* by specific historical (i.e., social, economic, political) circumstances. Worldviews are normally associated with a social movement. Goldmann speaks of world views as "constituting an aggregate of humanly coherent responses" on the part of "relatively homogeneous social groups, in similar historical situations or presenting certain similarities..." (Boelhower, 1980:113). As such, this conception counters the more classically idealist conception of the *weltanschaung*, as articulated, for instance, by late 19th-century German historicists, such as Dilthey, in the hands of whom the concept of worldview came to refer to the "unitary spirit of an epoch" (Boelhower, 1980:12). Thus, for example, the rationalism of the Enlightenment was not the rationalism of ancient Greece. From this specific angle, Goldmann's *vision du monde* may be seen as a form of discontinuity, and also a parallel phenomenon to Foucault's epistemic breaks. On the other hand, the difference between Goldmann's conception of cyclical world-views and Foucault's conception of epistemic emergences is that the shift to a new world view is fully accounted for in the transformations of *structuring processes* (i.e., this is the concept Goldmann uses to substitute for "structures") of events, transformations brought about by *plural subjects*, whereas epistemic breaks occur quite by chance.

Max Weber's landmark studies of religion, bureaucracy, the law, the city, the economy – in other words, his theoretical *oeuvre* as a whole – may be regarded as a work that is solidly grounded in historical analysis, it is theory in a "generically historical sense" (Roth, Introduction, in Weber, 1978:xxxvi). The sociological craft thus becomes, in his hands, "Clio's handmaiden," that is to say, an enterprise at the service of the illumination of historical events, through the reliance on typological schemes, at the same time that these events are explained *theoretically*, in the sense that the analysis "subsumes many discrete actions and is merely plausible..." (Roth, 1978:xxxvii).

Bendix (1977:388) sees Weber's treatment of history as a continuous and cumulative process couched in the Hegelian historiographical tradition, and more specifically, in Hegel's view of the history of Occidental civilization as a cumulative manifestation of rational freedom. This view "appears to be reflected in Weber's analysis of religious, legal, and organizational rationality in Western Europe." Weber's method for clarifying the problem of historical causality was that of *causal imputation*, which calls for necessary causal linkages between particular events or series of events and subsequent developments, thus underlining the principle of continuity in the historical process (Bendix, 1946:520). More specifically, Weber laid emphasis on the uniqueness of historical sequences and their necessary eventuation in specific outcomes. When the historical investigator explains the occurrence of a given historical phenomenon in reference to a particular causal variable – for instance, the American Civil war in reference to the operation of Southern slavery – this is done by elaborating an *internal analysis* of the event under investigation so as to identify its causal origins. Then, a "hypothetical sequence of action," that is, an alternative series of historical occurrences and outcomes that excludes the presumed causal variable (i.e., Southern slavery), is constructed, thus ascertaining on the basis of probability the course of events and the outcome would have been different had the causal factor relied upon (i.e., Southern slavery) been entirely absent. As Weber explains it, the analysis "should be concerned with the *distinctiveness* of each of the two developments that were finally so different, and the purpose of the comparison must be the causal explanation of the difference. It remains true, of course, that this causal explanation requires, as Weber explains," as an indispensable preparation the isolation ... of the individual components of the course of events, and for each component the orientation toward rules of experience and the formulation of clear concepts without which causal attribution is nowhere

possible" (1978:xxxvii). This methodological procedure establishes the *causal adequacy* of this causal variable. For our purposes here, the critical relevance of the Weberian strategy is its implicit emphasis on the idea of historical continuity.

This theme is also brought into sharp focus in the work of Norbert Elias for whom "old cultural forms could be turned to new ends, but they continued to convey vestiges of their original meaning" (Hutton, 1981:254). Maurice Mandelbaum (cited in Megill, 1979:451) insists a given phenomenon can only be properly understood if viewed dynamically, that is, in developmental terms, "in terms of the place that it occupies within some larger process of development."

The German historicism of the 19th century finds eloquent articulation in the theoretical system of Wilhelm Dilthey, which exerted a pronounced influence on Weber's own approach to history. Dilthey offers a parallel or counter argument to Nietzsche's use of the structural configuration of the cosmos as an analogue and basis of legitimation for his treatment of history as a discontinuous process, in the sense that Dilthey similarly establishes an analogical relation between history and life itself, but in the opposite sense of Nietzsche. That is, Dilthey sees structural coherence and unity as the foremost characteristic of life, which is therefore reflected in the historical unfolding of events. Life is apprehended in the consciousness of individuals as a coherent totality. More importantly, however, this structural unity is not something subjectively assigned to life (i.e., it is not a social construction), but an inherent property of life itself. This at once conveys the idea that the unfolding of "life" through time rests on continuity and integration, not on discontinuity and dispersion.

Dilthey appealed to his functionalist or organicist conception of the structure of personal or individual life as a *structural unity*, "a unity constructed on the basis of the interrelationships existing among all parts" (cited in Bulhof, 1976:23) in order to emphasize the *objective* unity of the social milieu and of history. The objective unity here is in the sense of a "visible, interpersonal, and enduring existence in material objects and social structures that can be perceived by others" (Bulhof, 1976:26), that is, of collective and historical life. He attempts to clarify the relationship between structure and process, or between synchronic and diachronic aspects of life, by relating together cultural/institutional arrangements, such as the family or religion and their function in history. He sees these arrangements as teleological in nature insofar as they appear to have a specific purpose in the social milieu, and earlier events presuppose current ones. In the stream of history, situations are arranged in coherent linkages whereby they "presuppose each other" as they move or evolve towards ever higher levels of structural complexity (Dilthey, cited in Bulhoff, 1976:31). Societies, like individuals, have a coherent and unified life history (*Lebengeschichte*). However, Dilthey refrained from taking a rigid position regarding this idea of a teleological history: each historical period or social formation had its own "intrinsic validity" (Bulhoff, 1976:31). We will turn to this point next.

Dilthey's conception of the continuous character of history is distinct in several ways (Bulhoff, 1976). His main concern is with portraying historical development as the temporal interlocking of structurally coherent, as well as continuously-evolving, sociocultural systems, rather than simply a succession of events, as conventional narrative history tends to do. These systems evolve through time, but not in terms of a naturalist (i.e., organic) teleology that fixes the nature of the specific transformation occurring at each stage of historical evolution. His approach is more, though not totally, open to contingency. He resorts to a circumstance of personal reality to throw light on this issue, by looking at the dialetical interaction between self and the external milieu. The individual early on acquires a "character-structure" (Bulhoff, 1976:29) which that once solidly established, will condition freedom and contingency; it will come to exercise a constraining, shaping effect on further psychic development. The self will continue to develop and may undergo transformations, but these will always be conditioned by its own internal structure and by historical circumstances. Historical change, in like fashion, does not occur randomly, but in relation

to a stream of occurrences; that is, it also stems from – and is thus conditioned – by the structure of the existing phenomenon. The latter, as Bulhoff (1976:30) puts it, "operates retrospectively as well," that is to say, it also determines the extent to which and the way in which current arrangements, or the present, assimilate the past.

Oakeshot (1983) explores the issue of continuity – indeed, the issue of the validity of the idea of history itself and what constitutes a proper model of historical inquiry – also making a case for the conception of historical understanding based on the aspect of continuity of historical events. In elaborating this formulation, however, he reworks some of the key concepts and premises to which traditional historiography is anchored. To begin with, the idea of continuity is not defended here necessarily in the conventional terms of narrative-teleological historiography, but in terms of the identification of "significant relationships," linking up the historical events. These relationships are not "fortuitous" or "chance" relationships, but exist on the basis of (what the investigator deems to be) structural correspondences between the subsequent and the antecedent events, or, stated differently, the structurally and ideologically significant ways in which the antecedent events mediate the emergence of the subsequent one(s). These significant relationships must be causal in nature (1983:70-72).

Oakeshott characterizes the events of the present as "survivals" of past events, which were themselves survivals or carryovers in terms of their link with earlier events, and at the same time, "exploits" or "performances" (*res gestae*), that is, human undertakings or accomplishments, created anew with each emergence of a historical situation. It is stressed, however, that the aspect of creation of these performances – a creative process that represents historical reality at any given point in time – must not be seen in terms of intentionality, but rather of being "the unintended outcomes of various and divergent designs..." (1983:54). The continuity between the "performances" of earlier historical eras and those of the present era may be established, even though these "performances" have undergone

transformation ("damage") along the way (1983:48). As such, events are always "vestigial" (1983:47), insofar as they stand for extensions of past circumstances, which have endured up to the present time, in modified form. The present is thus understood as a congerie of performances "which have survived" (1983:50).

Foucault's expression "the history of the present" may even be salvaged here, if we recast it to mean something other than what he intended, namely, that the idea of the present (i.e., its *history* or interpretation) is to suggest its being composed of fragments of a bygone present, which has become a past. The present, then, constitutes a particular moment in a historical stream of *presents*, whose future is potentially the means by which they become *pasts*. Apparently, the difficulty we may experience in immediately recognizing the connection between the current present and bygone presents stems from the fact that existing "objects" (i.e., existing reality) are understood primarily in their immediacy, in their "current usefulness."

The proper practice of historical study, would then seem to require scertaining the "authentic" (Oakeshott's term) character of objects by identifying their position and functionality in the historical process, through the identification of the objects's "language" (1983:52). Oakeshott's argument appears to treat historical objects as texts. The language of the texts would be their symbolic, representational, and ideological dimensions. The authenticity of historical objects rests, therefore, on their property of what might be termed intertextuality, or textual (*linguistic*, in the sense in which these languages are being treated here) interlinkages with other objects *through history*; it rests on "their transactional relationships with others" (1983:51) – which means at the fundamental level that history consists of temporally-situated configurations of "mutually-related occurrences" (1983:59), which may be understood from surviving records, and historical study at root involves the illumination of the connection between the object(s) of current reality and "the antecedent events to which it is significantly related" (1983:63). Furthermore, the significance of this relationship between historical events involved in the

investigation lies in its being a "causal relationship" (1983:72). Thus, the existence of a given historical event is explained in terms of this causal relationship to antecedent events, *a relationship of contingency* (1983:94).

From this standpoint, an historical situation is "a composition of notionally contemporaneous, mutually related historical occurrences" (Oakeshott, 1983:53). Its "mystery," its secrets, are for the investigator to unravel and reveal, not on the basis of allowing the historical "fragments" or survivals that make up the situation to "speak for themselves" (i.e., these "performances" are not meant to provide "direct evidence", to reveal overtly that which the investigation is seeking), but on the basis of what may be inferred. That is, the systematic procedure of inferrence is what is involved here, inferrence from the surviving remnants of bygone situations. The validity of historical study lies, therefore, in the process of interpretive reconstruction itself.

This natural characteristic of historical events and historical understanding, that is, the lack of transparency and immediacy in the provision of information, need not however be taken as clear grounds for outright indictment of history and historical understanding. This is a crucial point to stress in the task of rehabilitation of historical knowledge. As Oakeshott points out, the absence of "direct evidence" in the configuration of the present regarding the continuing presence and effect of "bygone situations which have not survived...does not stigmatize historical understanding as irreparably defective" (1983:56). Thus, from this perspective, what postmodern circles commonly see as the fundamental deficiency of historical understanding, namely, the inability to offer direct insight or evidence, would be in fact a "misconceived shortcoming" (1983:58). As conceived by Oakeshott, it is precisely a property of historical events to have this opacity regarding the revelation of knowledge. History cannot be seen as this linear progression of events, whose outcomes are clearly discernible because of their explicit and readily discernible causal linkages. Rather, it must be seen in contingent terms, whereby events occur as unintended outcomes

of an "uncovenanted circumstantial confluence of vicissitudes..." (1983:64). These events, therefore, are not to be understood as the product of the intentions of social actors, but rather as having "no exclusive characters, no predetermined outcomes and no inherent potentialities to issue in this rather than that, *but which an historical enquiry may show that and how they have in fact done so*" (1983:64-5; my emphasis).

This indicates that proper historical inquiry is supposed to unveil the linkages existing between the past and the present, between the event being focused on and the antecedent events interpreted as having an explanatory significance for the emergence of the object under investigation, without these linkages being necessarily readily or concretely perceivable – the antecedent and the subsequent events may in fact be outwardly unrelated, at the most, "obliquely related" (Oakeshott, 1983:66) – because they do not have to be of the same nature as the event being examined. Thus pursued, historical study unveils and clarifies the "not yet understood characters" of the antecedent factors (1983:65).

The idea of social change also undergoes conceptual reformulation here. New historical situations are not treated as the final destination (the *terminus*) in a linear, inevitable sequence of developments, as in traditional teleological treatments. Essentially, they are depicted simply as new "differences," or as phenomena of the same order as the events that antecede and are accountable for them. These antecedent events are also "differences" in relation to the earlier events.

The assemblage of historical events has unity and coherence, but this does not stem from teleological determinations and necessity. It comes from the very interrelation of the events in question, from their *contiguity*, as noted before, a contiguity of "differences," that is, of events that are contigently (but not conceptually) interrelated. This produces a particular conception of historical change, which is neither Foucauldian nor of the more traditional mold. Yet, the underlying theme of continuity sustains this theoretical elaboration. Insofar as new historical developments merely represent new

emergences, as patterns of contiguity involving the antecedent events unfold through time (something that amounts to a continuity of "heterogeneous and divergent tensions," 1983:117), the assignment of a conceptual identity to these multiform developments (e.g., the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment) has to be tentative, and grounded in the researcher's recognition that his/her interpretation of the past with relation to the present has a "probationary" character, as does the character of historical understanding as such. However, it bears repeating here that this is not an inherent deficiency of historical understanding, but only a frame of analysis that best fits the character of historical things (Oakeshott, 1983:111-18).

It is worth noting the emphasis assigned by this author to the idea of continuity in historical understanding, to the reconstruction of the historical event in terms of continuities and convergences. The event to be explained is treated in terms of its existence as a "by-product of a past composed of antecedent events" (1983:64). Yet, as should by now be clear, this formulation does not rest on the intentionality or teleology of historical events. The elements that collectively compose a given historical situation are thus multiform and unrelated to one another, that is, they have only converged "circumstantially" at a given point in time, thus granting form and substance to the historical situation under study. Traditional versions of teleology tend to be rigidly deterministic, "incapable of diverging from its course or of failing to reach its destination" (1983:104). Oakeshott's viewpoint, being predicated on the idea of contingency, advances the idea of history as an open project, one that is couched in continuity but not linear determinism. The continuity is expressed more in terms of *contiguity* (1983:113), rather than teleological inevitability.

The historical event being studied is fundamentally the "unintended eventual by-product" of the "transactional engagements" of individuals at a particular point in history. These engagements in turn are the unintended eventual by-products of earlier ones. Teleology is conceptually recast here in terms that do not imply a simple, all-embracing process of

historical movement, a necessary series of historical stages, each being an indispensable step on the way to the following one, towards the final outcome (the *terminus*). In the conventional conception, each stage represents the actualization of its potential, or possibility, which was already embodied in the antecedent stage(s). The reworking of the concept has required that it be taken as the interrelation of "completed (but teleologically unrelated) teleological processes, either comprehensive completed chapters of human experience (like Spengler's *cultures* or Toynbees' *civilizations*), or segments of conceptually identified human engagements, like Trotsky's *economic regimes*" (1983:103).

We may now consider Johann Droysen's theory of history. Droysen's defense of history – that is to say, of historical understanding as traditionally conceived – is built on the basis of a conception of social evolution whereby "parts of the past are contained and live on in every stage of human history" (Burger, 1977:170), which means, of a conception of history as continuous history. As such, his defense is squarely within the 19th century German tradition of historicism reaching back to Hegel. Droysen postulated his model of history as one in which the present is linked to the past in terms of a chain of "moral partnerships," referring to the actual *forms* of historical development, the structured ways of acting and thinking of the collectivity, the institutional embodiment of the society's core ideals and values. As Droysen himself explains it (1967:83), it is in these moral partnerships that "we become bodily and spiritually what we are, and by virtue of which we raise ourselves above the miserable desolation and indigence of our atomic egoism, giving and receiving in order thus to become the richer the more we bind and obligate ourselves."[9] Here, too, his views specifically reflect the Hegelian influence in the sense that Hegel also conceived of history as the progressive development of morality.

We are informed (Burger, 1977:168) that by the late 1800s the historicist tradition was coming under attack by the developing positivist orientation in the human sciences, which

called for greater methodological rigor in historical investigation. Droysen is said to have effectively met this challenge, by arguing for the continuing fruitfulness of historical understanding on the basis of its moral guidance for future human endeavors. The positivistic position was that nomological (i.e., positivistic or empirically-informed) knowledge, of the kind that Comte wished to have as the foundation of sociological inquiry, affords insights into human nature that will in turn lead to the betterment of human life. The positivists did not feel that history as such, that is, history functioning as the description of "particular series and unique constellations of events," was capable of generating normative principles that could be applied to the administration of social life. Droysen's task in this connection consisted precisely of demonstrating how "the application of nomological knowledge to social affairs does not necessarily result in human betterment; on the other hand, he advanced the claim that the series of past events investigated by historians does reveal a principle whose knowledge is indispensable to the advancement of mankind" (Burger, 1977:169).

Droysen stresses the necessity of historical understanding and stipulates it must be of the *verstehen* type, requiring that our cognitive or interpretative apprehension of past events be coupled with a value (i.e., ethical) orientation ("personal involvement," Burger, 1977:172); that it be grounded in the obligations and responsibilities that each person has towards the community; that it be oriented by the bond that we establish towards one another in social life (Droysen, 1967:12-14). Historical sensitivity and understanding are essential for enabling us to make morally-informed decisions, based on a "dialogue" with those generations that came before us, in such a way that this experience comes to shape the "core of [the individual's] personal existence from which [his/her] commitments flow" (Burger, 1967:172). The constant renovation (with the passage of time, the flow of history) of the moral partnerships composing social life affords the operation of thought-qua-critical consciousness, which is directed at "that which is and yet is not as it should be" (Droysen, 1967:45). It

affords, therefore, the possibility individuals will assume a critical stance towards the status quo, a stance informed by their knowledge of the past. This critical property of Thought, whereby it exercises "censorship" over structural conditions as they appear, had been postulated before Droysen – as he himself notes – by Hegel, and it forms the basis of the Hegelian dialectical model of history.

The moral commitment and purpose that the historian, and individuals in general, must ideally develop and cultivate as they ponder "the lessons of the past" imparts a *critical* dimension to their stance toward society, that is, it enables individuals to identify and attack the problems of the present in relation to what they have learned from past events, and thus to set the proper course to their collective affairs. In this sense, historical understanding reinforces the dynamic quality of human social life, the continual transcendence of the current order of things by individuals. Considered in this light, history does have something to teach us. As Droysen says (1967:53-54), "[h]istory is not instructive [solely] in consequence of affording patterns for imitation or rules for new application, but through the fact that we mentally live it over again and live according to it..." The architecture of social life "derives its matter as well as its forms from History." Historical consciousness and historical study influence the course and nature of present life in both practical terms – they are "the basis for political improvement and culture" (1967:56) – , and, more importantly, in terms of giving sustenance and purpose to the spirit of the present generation, "to the spirit that fills and bears on the life of History" (1967:55). From this standpoint, the past energizes us morally. It becomes, in Burger's view (1977:171), a "moral education" which grows continuously in scope as history unfolds, and thus deepens our understanding of ourselves as time passes.

Gramsci (in Cavalcanti and Piccone, 1975) addresses the problem of collective anxiety regarding historical existence by framing this issue in the context of meaning. It is a fact that too often we are confronted with the elusiveness of existential meaning owing to our sensitivity and vulnerability towards the

absurdity that envelops life in all of its essential dimensions. But the search for meaning goes on, and must go on. We may find ourselves voicing this concern and reasoning with Gramsci that, despite our immersion into surrounding reality, we are still left with some undefinable needs, needs which he calls "metaphysical" (after Schopenhauer), but which can more properly be termed existential. We are told how, in our "fantastic roaming" through the infinite, we are utterly perplexed by the void before us, so we instinctively deposit our fears and perplexities in religious systems, which in turn impose order and purpose on all of our actions and affairs. Yet, the search for meaning does not have to go any farther than *life* itself. It is in historical activity, in our own sense of historicity, that we must find the end to our uncertainty and the reaffirmation of the purpose of life. While acknowledging the inner anguish of individuals, Gramsci explicity argues, in opposition to Sartre and Camus, that "the explanation of our existence can only be found in history" (1975:70). In this connection, methodological practices geared to the discovery of the meaning of historical phenomena must take into account the fact that this meaning cannot be discerned apart from function, totality, and the subject. In specific terms, one must identify the functionality of the object in relation to the praxis of the collective subject. Meaning is not transparent. Given that the event can only be understood in the context of "the broader structure of which it is part and in which it has a function" (Goldmann, 1976:112), the question of *mediated* meaning becomes crucial. To grasp the meaning of historical totalities, it is necessary to "discover their connections and their mediations" (Goldmann, 1980:50).

It follows that the human subject is inseparable from the historical process, since it is human praxis that becomes the matrix for the functionality of the historical object, hence, for meaning. From this perspective, the attempt to de-anthropologize the subject of creation is rendered clearly untenable. There is no ambiguity in Gramsci's contention that our faith should not be deposited in artificial systems (i.e. religion) – nor, one might add, in abstract formulations, as postulated by Foucault, but

rather, in "man, his will and his activity" (Gramsci, in Cavalcanti and Piccone, 1975:70).

As for the problem of continuity, insofar as we know that existential meaning is to be drawn from history, we cannot dissociate ourselves from the stream of history or the past. Foucault's historical enterprise is antithetical to this idea. But it is the past that functions as a driving force of the present, and gives, in Gramsci's words, "the energetic certainty that what has been possible will still be so" (1975:70).

PART II

VI. Bridging the Sociology/History Duality: Historical Sociology

In seeking to address the nature of historical sociology here, I will revisit the traditional (and, analysts now increasingly say, outmoded) scheme for distinguishing between sociology and history in terms of the former being a "generalizing" discipline, and the latter, a "particularizing" one. According to this scheme, historical sociology would be regarded as a synthetic enterprise that integrates the opposing tendencies of sociology and history as these disciplines are generally conceived. Conventional scholarship has treated sociology as an enterprise concerning itself with the general explanation (of phenomena), the latter being formulated on the basis of general principles. In this capacity it exists as a science of society in the Comtian mold, approaching the *social* in the spirit of the sciences of Nature. Its specific focus is the study of social structure and the "full range of human behavior" (Burke, 1980), concerning the general patterns that undergird institutional and interpersonal relations. The main emphasis is on the generality of the structural patterns and relations that make up human society everywhere. Sociology thus emphasizes a synchronic approach to social life and functions largely as a nomothetic discipline, a social statics, predicated on the formulation and application of general or universal laws and geared to the description of processes that promote the maintenance of the social order. History may be seen as a kindred discipline here, insofar as it is also considered to be

concerned with the study of social life and the full range of human behavior, but its focus is distinctly different: it is not directed to the generalities of social life and social structure across different societies. Rather, it identifies and stresses the differences and particularities that set these societies apart and the processes whereby each society has evolved over time. The focus of history is therefore diachronic (i.e., oriented to transformation), making the discipline one that is essentially idiographic, or oriented towards the "particular", towards the society's unique patterns of social life and development, leading to social change.

Though much out of vogue in the present-day historiographical discourse, I think this distinction still has its utility insofar as it provides a broadly contrasting characterization of the two disciplines. It actually reaches back to late 1800s Germany and the debate in that society between the neo-Kantians and the neo-Hegelians over the nature and status of epistemological knowledge. Despite the fact these groups split over what each saw as the key distinguishing aspect between history and science, between historical knowledge and scientific knowledge – the neo-Kantians, led by Wilhelm Windelband, identified this aspect in the aim of the historical vs. the scientific disciplines, while the neo-Hegelians, led by Wilhelm Dilthey, felt this aspect to be the type of object of study of each type of discipline – they converged at the most fundamental level, in their characterization of history and science as constitutively different fields of knowledge. The neo-Kantians stressed this difference as stemming from the fact that history was a particularizing discipline, predicated on the acquisition of idiographic knowledge, and the sciences were generalizing disciplines, predicated on the acquisition of nomothetic knowledge. The neo-Hegelians shifted the focus to the fact that the human sciences, including history, belonged to the group of areas of knowledge designated as the *Geisteswissenschaften* (Sciences of the Spirit), whereas the natural sciences belonged to the *Naturwissenschaften* (Sciences of Nature). Of necessity, the object of study of the former were "the products of the human

spirit," while for the latter this pertained to "the products of purely physico-chemical processes" (White, 1993:381).

Several commentators (e.g., Burke, 1980) have pointed to the complementarity between history and sociology – for instance, the fact that although history focuses on change, a diachronic aspect, and sociology on structure, a synchronic aspect (hence, they focus on opposing elements), "[c]hange is structured, and structures change" (Burke, 1980:13). Yet, our attention is also drawn to the fact that these disciplines stand in a generally adversarial position towards each other. As Burke describes it, "[i]n Britain at least, many historians still regard sociologists as people who state the obvious in a barbarous and abstract jargon, lack any sense of place or time, squeeze individuals into rigid categories and, to cap it all, believe that these activities are 'scientific.' Sociologists for their part see historians as amateurish myopic fact-collectors without a method, the vagueness of their data matched only by their incapacity to analyse them" (1980:13-14).

However, the conceptual and methodological boundary lines ordinarily drawn between the sociological and historical disciplines tend to blur if considered in reference to the fact these disciplines have common frontiers regarding the following analytical and methodological aspects. While it may be the case that sociology shows a basic concern with conceptual synthesis and generalization, drawn from the identification of the general features of phenomena, and history shows a basic concern with establishing the *truth* of particular events in the past, it is also a fact this truth historians ascertain regarding particular events is at the same time an expression of a larger truth, a larger tendency, the dimension of generality, that would be common to other events of the same type. Thus, for instance, a study of the French Revolution of 1789 will unveil not only the unique set of forces responsible for the occurrence of that revolution, but also the features that mark the unfolding of revolutions in general. In this perspective, when historians identify and delineate the character of events in the past, they reveal both the particular and the general character of these events under study. By the same

token, when sociologists formulate general laws or propositions about social reality drawn from the examination of the network of structural-functional relations that constitute the phenomenon under study, and determine its position in the social system, this inquiry must also be informed by the knowledge of its developmental patterns.

This overlapping of analytical focus and procedure – that is, the practice of broad scientific inquiry entailing a focus on the uniformities and regularities of society, as the latter passes through progressive stages of historical evolution – reaches back, we are told (Holloway, 1963:156) to the historian-sociologists of the 18th century Scottish Enlightenment, and continues through the work of scholars in the late 19th century and early 20th, many of whom "were as much sociologists as historians" (Weber, for instance, who called history into service in his monumental study of legitimate power, or *authority*), insofar as they delved equally into the problems of social structure and social institutions, networks of relations, typical sequences, *and* the aspect of social change.

The framing of this problematic in Weber's discussion of sociology and history justifies the conception and practice of a historical sociology, to the extent this variety of sociological inquiry dissolves the conceptual and methodological distinction separating the two disciplines. Weber (as discussed in Bendix, 1946) portrays the historian's task as that of investigating the causes behind unique events and phenomena in the past. The selection of the aspects unique to the event or phenomenon – unique in the sense these aspects pertain exclusively to the phenomenon in question, and thus constitute the phenomenon or event as a unique entity, separate from others – must ideally be informed by the historian's *prior knowledge* of the regularities of human conduct (Bendix, 1946:522). This knowledge will enable the investigator to determine with a margin of certitude what the historical outcome might have been, had this phenomenon (e.g., a major battle) manifested itself in a different way, or not occurred at all. Sociology provides this knowledge in the concrete form of a comparative framework of analysis which

takes "the entire known history of mankind for its province." Sociology affords a comparative grasp of the patterns of human behavior, that is to say "a knowledge of the range of the recurrent types of individual conduct" (1946:522). These recurrent patterns or types of conduct of individuals are the *ideal types*, the central methodological device in the Weberian theoretical system, encompassing "the historical range of [the] regularities of behavior" (1946:523). Each event or phenomenon is presented as having unique aspects, or having been *caused* by a particular configuration of factors (the absence of which would have prevented the occurrence of the event). The comparative focus of sociology effected through the contrast of the ideal types is precisely that which enables the analyst to identify the aspects unique to each phenomenon or event, or to say, decisive for the identification of each *type*.

From this point of view, the enterprise of historical sociology breaks down the ideographic/nomothetic duality which is conventionally drawn between history and sociology. The ideal-type, the main sociological tool here, organizes and classifies the manifold of historical instances into distinct conceptual categories constructed on the basis of the set of aspects the investigator selects as being uniquely representative of each type. These ideal types never correspond perfectly with their empirical referents, that is, there is never a perfect match between the conceptual and empirical dimensions. The task of the historian who relies on this methodological strategy is precisely to move back and forth between the idiographic examination of the various historical instances of the phenomenon and the nomothetic construction of a typology which will explain the range of possible manifestations of this phenomenon.

Boundary lines are also customarily drawn to separate history and sociology with regard to the aspect of methodology, whereby sociology is portrayed as adhering more strongly to quantitative techniques of research, an aspect that reflects the influence on sociology by the natural sciences; and history leans towards qualitative methods of inquiry, which favor the

hermeneutical understanding of phenomena. In practice, these lines of division between sociological and historical research are problematic insofar as they have implications of methodological exclusiveness for the disciplines involved, with repercussions, in turn, for the research questions to be asked (see Holloway, 1963:154-56). A historically-informed sociology (e.g., *à la* Weber or Marx) demonstrates this intertwining of the impulses that animate the work of practitioners in these disciplines. Our interest here is to ascertain the impact the debate on the validity of continuous vs. discontinuous history will have on the epistemological status of socio-historical explanation.

The appeal to earlier models of scholarship models which were operative at a time (for instance, the 18th century Enlightenment) when Western societies had not yet become fully bureaucratized in their patterns of institutional life, seems to remind us that fields of inquiry, like sociology and history – indeed, the broader array of social sciences and the humanities – functioned for the most part as an "all-inclusive study of society" (Holloway, 1963:156). Therefore, instead of considering the criteria that differentiate these various fields of knowledge as natural boundaries, that is, boundaries that inhere in the very nature of the each discipline, it should be recognized these dividing lines are the artificial creation of the high level of bureaucratic and political administration that has come to these fields of knowledge. Modern bureaucracy has increasingly led academic fields to seek actively to demarcate and protect their intellectual territories, thus establishing their political autonomy and authority in relation to other fields.

VII. Conclusions

By way of a summary and recapitulation, it may be said that our chief task here has been of identifying and assessing the premises and implications of the postmodern conception of discontinuous history with specific reference to Foucault's model of genealogical history, and the direct relevance of this for a historically and critically informed sociology. This model of historical inquiry may be categorized within the broad

postmodern umbrella of scholarship, which, as pertains to the problem of history, rejects the idea of a monolithic, unified, singular history. The postmodern challenge to traditional history has been identified (Rosenau, 1992:63) on the basis of the following criteria: "(1) the idea that there is a real, knowable past, a record of evolutionary progress of human ideas, institutions, or actions, (2) the view that historians should be objective, (3) that reason enables historians to explain the past, and (4) that the role of history is to interpret and transmit human cultural and intellectual heritage from generation to generation." The central question, in this connection, seems to hinge on whether this postmodern conception is the most appropriate model for effectively addressing the nature and requirements of the current times, or whether this is a task that can still be accomplished by recourse to traditional history. At its most fundamental, this question takes us back to the concerns and aims of the Enlightenment, specifically involving the determination of whether the principles and ideals of the Enlightenment – the primacy of traditional Reason (i.e., reason in the Kantian and Hegelian mold), universal truth, broadly philosophical discourses (i.e., the *metanarratives*, such as, for instance, Marxism), all of which are embodied in traditional history, do not lend themselves to appropriation by structures and processes of social domination, in addition to hindering the awareness of these processes of domination "by coloring our perceptions with claims of emancipation, progress, and justice" (Farganis, 1996:420).

Rosenau (1992:ch.4) has distinguished between the "skeptical" and the "affirmative" post-modernist writers. The first group (formed mainly by the French "post-structuralist" thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard) is far more radical in its rejection of traditional historiography, insisting history has exhausted its possibilities and thus outlived its usefulness, and that present generations have moved beyond the grip of history, that is, of a historical consciousness which they see as no longer having anything to offer in terms of enlightenment and practical solutions. Their criticism cuts deeply into the more fundamental premises undergirding historical thinking and writing, such as the

idea that historical time can be construed as a single, monolithic, continuous thread, along which events can be apprehended (by the historian) and deemed factual, notwithstanding the fact that empirical verification cannot be relied upon – certainly not in a comprehensive and direct sense – to give assurance of the existence of these events. Once the existence of these events has been formalized and reified into the academic and popular consciousness, the historian will set about the identification of these events as historical markers of varying degrees of importance – some are construed as critical turning points – in the endless stream of Time. Then, they are organized in such a way as to make possible the demarcation of unified historical periods on the basis of various criteria. The whole process of historical study and interpretation becomes suspect, from this perspective, as a deeply arbitrary enterprise. In this connection, serious questions are raised about "historical theories of revolution, social change, and progress" (1992:64). Postmodern historiography has a centrally deconstructive tendency that highlights precisely this arbitrary, hence, authoritarian, aspect of traditional historiography, as witnessed, for instance, in the use of language as a medium of manipulation (see, e.g., Partner's comments on the linguistic expression of this process of domination, in Smith-Rosenberg, 1986:31).

Taking this debate into account, the present analysis has contrasted arguments for continuous and discontinuous history. It has also sought to demonstrate not only the continuing relevance of historical study – that is, the status of historical investigation as a viable and valid methodological and epistemological approach – but also the fact that the past can be utilized so as to illuminate the present. This position, particularly in its systematic focus on the coherent connection of the past with the present, and its assumption that the past may be relied upon as a frame of reference as we attempt to deal with the problems of the present, is clearly incompatible with Foucault's radical reconstruction of historical understanding. Yet, a common ground – a very general one – may be found in the fact that Foucault's criticism of traditional history does not equate with his

disavowal of the historical enterprise as such. In any event, further qualifications will be offered regarding the relationship between Foucault's viewpoint and the one advocated in the present analysis.

A point of departure in the respect may be the distinction between Foucault's modes of analysis, within the context of his larger body of work, between his "archaeology" and "genealogy." These may be taken to represent two distinct phases, the archaeology standing for his early work, the genealogy for his later one (see Smart, 1985). His "archaeological" investigations consist of "a way of doing historical analysis of systems of thought or discourse" (Smart, 1985:48). This focus, which is systematically found in Foucault's studies of power, is highly innovative and useful for drawing sociological attention to discursive forms and levels of social domination, that is to say, to social domination as embodied in discursive practices. Yet, the subsequent phase, the "genealogy," is not unrelated to the preceding one, both thematically and ideology. From a more substantive standpoint, it refers to the part of his historiographical work that is more directly inspired by, and anchored to, Nietzsche's redrafting of traditional history, which redirects attention to ruptures and breakthroughs, to "small details, minor shifts, and subtle contours... discontinuity and arbitrariness" (Burrell, cited in Rosenau, 1992:67), to the aspects of "disparity and dispersion," rather than "unbroken continuity linking phenomena" (Smart, 1985:56). In one sense, this type of genealogical history enriches sociohistorical inquiry by revealing the historicity (i.e., the diachronic transformation) of aspects of social life which are not normally considered systematically or in terms of their historical evolution, in studies of social domination. These are such things as, for instance, "the physiology of the body, sentiment, feelings, morality..." (Smart, 1985:57). These aspects underscore the fact that the workings of social domination are not limited to their manifestation in contexts of political economy – the State, the Law, or the Economy; in class relations, to put it differently – or in centralized structures, having a single material base. Rather, they

are operative at the symbolic and representational levels of social life as well, specifically as evidenced in the development and implementation of disciplinary techniques designed for social control and domination, such as techniques of surveillance, examination, and discipline, which Foucault had ample opportunity to see in operation during his days as a worker in a psychiatric hospital, out of which experience emerged *Madness and Civilization: Madness and Insanity in the Age of Reason*. These disciplinary techniques are conducive to social control in connection with the extent to which they facilitate the process of obtaining knowledge about individuals. A good example here is the discourse of psychoanalysis. (See Sawicki, in Shanley and Pateman, 1991:221). Another instantiation of this process of social control and domination which Foucault focusses on are, as described by Butler (1990:16), "the regulatory practices that generate [sexual] identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms." This amounts to a reification of social identities, as in the case of sexual/gender categories, whereby individuals come to take for granted (thus failing to problematize), by virtue of their socialization experience, the classificatory schemes of the society which lock them into categories of oppression. The radical element in Foucault's critique which Butler calls attention to (1991:95-6) is precisely that the resistance mounted by minority group against the arrangements that victimize them ordinarily fails to aim at, and thus "deconstruct," the more fundamental level of *social construction* and institutionalization of the dominant and subaltern social categories (e.g., those having to do with race and race classification, the binary gender identities). This foundational shift in focus in the analysis of power was aptly addressed by a recent commentator: "The real transactions of power are not in the relationships of citizens to the state, but in the relationships of people to teachers, doctors, therapists, social workers, and psychiatrists. These are not the benign and ameliatory aides of the welfare state but rather moral agents whose disciplinary power is based on their membership in the credentialed knowledge elite" (Farganis, 1996:420). In relation to this, Foucault's historical analysis of power expands

the domain of the political to include a "heterogeneous ensemble of power relations operating at the microlevel of society" (Sawicki, in Shanley and Pateman, 1991:222).

In taking a critical position towards traditional history, specifically, in portraying the existing networks of social forms not as the culmination or end of a succession of events, of a linear process of development, but as merely transitory arrangements, temporary "embodiments of dynamic relationships of struggle" (Smart, 1985:57) between social groups – reinforces the depiction of social reality as a contingent scheme of things; thus, the latter constitutes a product not of the deliberations of the active historical Subject, but of "the play of dominations" (Smart, 1985:57). This contingent character of social reality suggests its potential transformation and undermines the idea of its historical necessity, something which, in principle, opens up possibilities for social change and freedom. The removal of the idea of necessity from the analysis of social reality has direct implications for freedom, insofar as specific social practices and arrangements which are linked to processes of social differentiation and control need not be seen as necessary. As Smart points out, "no necessity determined that mad people would be regarded as mentally ill, that criminals should be imprisoned..." (1985:58). This procedure thus amounts to a problematization of much that is foundational, and considered to be self-evident, insofar as social knowledge and social practices are concerned. This is directly relevant to a critically informed historical sociology that seeks to stress the dynamic (i.e., transitional) and contingent character of social events and phenomena, and the fact the transcendence of existing reality – that is, existing arrangements, practices, rules, knowledge –is always within the reach of present generations. (I noted earlier more conventional lines of historical inquiry need not be taken as leading inevitably to a deterministic treatment of events; nevertheless, it is more likely this will happen in association with the practice of traditional history, therefore, Foucault's genealogical version would seem to make a specific contribution towards averting this possibility.)

Another implication of the cultivation of a traditional history is the evolutionary conception whereby the present constellation of events is always seen as an improvement over preceding ones. The genealogical interpretation reveals that intergroup domination endures in levels and aspects of social interaction generally neglected; it reveals "the eternal play of dominations, the domain of violence, subjugations, and struggle" (Smart, 1985:59), operative in social levels that do not lend themselves as readily and overtly to scrutiny.

Finally, as pertains to the aspect of power, and its workings and consequences in social life, Foucault's genealogical history and its particular treatment of power as a *polymorphisme*, that is, as something that is "without given demarcations or positions" (Isenberg, 1991:301), can be highly fruitful for social historians and other sociological practitioners interested in tracing the evolution of processes of power, as shaping forces of present circumstances. This contribution may be evidenced in the fact the genealogical treatment of power builds upon the traditional conception whereby power is invariably depicted in dichotomous terms (e.g., the Marxist scheme, with its treatment of the powerful –that is, the ownership class – and the powerless – that is, the working class), as something exclusively derived from the exercise of economic and political dominance, and tied to the activities of specific classes and groups. Here, as indicated above, power is found in operation in a multiplicity of forms, effectively (and insidiously) maintaining patterns of social subjugation as it meanders through the interstices of social classes and institutional relations, areas where it is least likely to be detected and investigated.

As already stressed, this line of interpretation proves particularly useful in the unveiling and elucidation of forms of intergroup inequality are normally bypassed in conventional analyses, such as in the example provided earlier, to wit, modalities of racial and gender domination that are manifested in language and other levels of intergroup relations, thus falling outside the sphere of strictly economic and political action. Foucault's *postmodernist* (broadly conceived) discourse on power may be characterized as a singularly effective strategy for grappling with the diversified character of intergroup inequality in modern pluralist societies. "Played out on the contemporary political stage," says Farganis (1996:420), "[the postmodern treatment of power, as manifested in Foucault's writings] has legitimated the expression of voices from many quarters, each asserting its own truths, and each engaged in a struggle for power to legitimate itself politically..." The resistance to mechanisms of power and control is thus conceived as *regionally-based* resistance. Direct evidence of this may be had in the proliferation of political protest within minority movements that, at one time, functioned in a rather unified fashion, and are now segmentalized and even marked by direct conflict between some of its component factions (e.g., the present varieties of feminism and feminist theory).

All things considered, we must now return to the central organizing principle of this project – to reassert the epistemological and axiological (normative) validity and usefulness of historical understanding, as traditionally conceived and pursued. Despite the claims and admonitions of the antihistoricist camp, and the charges that because consciousness cannot escape its socio-historical space it becomes ideologically conservative and parochial, historical transcendence need not be denied individuals simply because they appeal to the past as a source of illumination and guidance regarding their present circumstances. The embeddedness of human life in historical continuity need not be inexorably equated with teleological determinism nor with the neutralization of the critical consciousness. We may invoke the themes of Sartrean existentialism in the attempt to shore up this viewpoint. The relationship of the new to the old must not be structured in linear terms, whereby we either reject the past and tradition altogether so as to be able to move forward on the basis of freely chosen existential courses, or alternatively, we identify and accept our standing in a teleological movement of history within which each historical period is "frozen" through reification, through being experienced by individuals as the inevitable outcome of past

events. Yet another option is available, that of acknowledging the thread of continuity between past and contemporary reality, and then use the past as a source of insight into the present condition, with a better understanding of the latter on account of the former – a better understanding of who we are, where we are, and where we are going – while at the same time rejecting the past as rigid determination of the present, refusing to bow to the idea of inevitability of present circumstances simply because they originate in circumstances of periods gone by. In this way, the essential contingency of the present is preserved, while the tendency to rely on the past for its own sake – whether as the shaping force of the present, or as refuge from the problems of the present – is eschewed. By arguing along these lines, it is necessary to envisage the idea of historical continuity as one which coexists with discontinuity as well. The two notions therefore must be treated as conterminous, not as mutually exclusive. (We looked earlier, for instance, at several historicist perspectives most of which stressed in one way or another continuity of historical development, but in a way that framed historical continuity together with the aspect of discontinuity.)

The present analysis seeks to contribute towards establishing the continuous character of history, on the one hand, and showing its heuristic and normative value for present generations, on the other. In this connection, greater specification of the analytical approach to be followed is required. The task is twofold. First, a recommendation should be given as to how it is possible for the analyst to understand and thus to reconstitute the past. Second, it must be shown what specific connections link the past with the present, allowing the latter to be normatively influenced by the former. Toward that goal we go back to drink from the historicist spring, to revisit its claims and perhaps integrate them into a workable strategy for understanding the past. The effort will be geared specifically to a combination of the views of Wilhelm Dilthey and Johann Droysen, with Dilthey supplying the analytical tools with which we can grapple with the problem of epistemology, that is, with which we can know the past; and with Droysen providing the materials for an elucidation

of the normative effect of the past on the present, that is, of how the past can provide lessons to orient social action in the present in an effective, rational, and productive manner.

In keeping with the Diltheyan model of analysis, we must bring the question of meaning to the fore, insofar as the historian investigator is concerned primarily with the unveiling and explication of the meaning of the past. The past must be treated hermeneutically, that is to say, as a *text*, as *expression*, as a meaning-context. This is the essential purpose of a hermeneutical historiography, which starts by identifying the organic interconnections, or part-whole relations, that make up the particular historical situation – or *lifeworld* – of the collectivity under study.

It is not sufficient, however, to simply reconstruct the structural framework of the lifeworld of the citizens of the past. It is necessary to show (if the principle of historical continuity is to be reaffirmed) that Droysen's *moral powers* was a force that not only caused this lifeworld to hold together, but also made it possible for basic patterns of thought and behavior to endure over time, notwithstanding the material alterations that the society under study would have gone through with the passage of time.

The foregoing makes the epistemological and axiological dimensions of the challenge that faces the historian quite plain. We must not only acquire reliable knowledge about the past but also identify the mechanisms that link the past with the present. Droysen's focus on morality becomes vitally important in this respect, but it must be integrated with Dilthey's focus on the world of lived experience. That world is sustained on the basis of collectively created and shared meanings. Droysen's "moral community" is in fact the world of culture and social interaction. Social actors internalize the moral force of society through being socialized into (and, then, externalizing, behaviorally and ideologically) the ruling beliefs and values of the society.

Thus, the Diltheyan formulation of "life" and the Droysean formulation of "morality" are anchored to the same

element, namely, sociocultural meaning. The dialectical aspect involved in the synthetic merging of these concepts emerges in the sense that life and morality simultaneously distinguish and integrate immanence and transcendence, continuity and discontinuity, the static (synchronic) and dynamic (diachronic) dimensions of collective life. In this connection, *life* (i.e., the signifier for historicity in Dilthey) denotes the distinctiveness or uniqueness of each historical situation, as well as something that binds humankind together, across all historical periods.

The same may be said for *morality*, in that within each historical setting the elements of morality (represented by the society's dominant values and norms, which tend to be framed in a religious meaning-context) delimit and shape the nature of social life, thus imparting a distinctive character to it. At the same time, the basis of morality of a society endures through generations, in the sense that, as I see it, once deeply entrenched in the collective consciousness, hegemonic ways of thinking are extremely durable, continuing to operate implicitly as normative principles that structure the mode of thought and behavior of the group, in spite of material transformations that may be taking place in the society. (It is this relation to this process that one can speak of *national character* as an analytical referent, an aspect that endures vis-a-vis shifting material circumstances).

The disenchantment of present generations with history as a source of normative and moral wisdom, an aspect that has been an ever more salient feature of the present century, and which may be currently classified under the larger rubric of the "postmodern critique of history" appears to be vitiated by an all-encompassing relativism that ends up relativizing itself, and thus destroying its own base of legitimacy (Larrain, 1994). As such, it ends up in a position of ideological absolutism. We may examine this situation by framing it in the larger context of the critique of postmodern social theory. While exhibiting deep and generalized skepticism towards modernist claims of truth, the pre-eminence of Reason, totalizing discourses (the *metanarratives*, as exemplified, for instance, by Marxism), postmodern social/historical theory, it is contended (Larrain,

1994), fails to justify its own position. In eschewing the modernist bandwagon, postmodern writers (including those associated with the formulation of the "New History") have set out on a journey of relentless deconstructing of traditional ideological positions and themes, which, over the long term, undermines their ability to bear up under their own critique. Postmodern relativism and distrust of Reason may ultimately lead to analytical one-sidedness and social insensitivity, making it difficult – or impossible – for anyone to exercise optimism towards the resolution of social problems and towards the future. A generalized tendency towards relativism and/or cynicism may then prevail, the upshot of which is an unintended -- but effective all the same -- legitimation of existing arrangements.

The promise of the past in relation to the present and future should be apparent at this point, a promise that can be realized so long as the past is not apprehended as an end in itself, which is an *antiquarian* treatment, fraught with all sorts of negative implications. Rather, it must be treated as a *dynamic* reference for the present, "a way of providing perspectives on the present that contribute to the solution of problems peculiar to our time" (White, 1966:125). The past *must* exist as recognition so as to fulfill a twofold function: first, a function that is, in a particular sense, a normative one, providing us with an ethical basis for the transition from present to future. According to Hegel (cited in White, 1966:133), the past is born *de novo* in human consciousness and becomes restructured, through knowledge (i.e., through objectification), as *present* existence. This amounts to no less than a reversal of the Foucauldian notion, specifically, that of the *present* as past. Second, it amounts to a heuristically fruitful function, generating in consciousness an awareness of the process of change, of the relativity of events, as linked to the human ability to make history as dictated by conscious choice. Properly utilized, the insights generated by the events that came before us might well serve to enhance our sense of wisdom and responsibility towards our social arrangements and practices, thereby leading to greater humanization of current reality.

In the absence of historical sensitivity, of a historical imagination, individuals remain crippled in their ability to understand their existence in larger, structural terms. They are likely to see and understand their lives – as it unfolds at both the interpersonal and institutional levels – strictly in terms of interpersonal networks and relations, and other related aspects. They therefore treat the patterns of their existence in abstraction from the historical stream of events and the macrolevel societal structures and processes, which is in fact what gives form and substance to individual and collective life. Their understanding of these things will therefore take the form of a microlevel perspective which, in being partial, will prove woefully inadequate for grasping the manifold of experience, for organizing and orienting personal as well as interpersonal life. The negative implications flowing from this ahistorical, relentlessly microlevel stance towards life need scarcely be emphasized at this point. If valuable lessons are not always forthcoming from our awareness of the past, helping us steer a more solid and profitable course towards the future, the alternative situation, that is, the absence of this awareness hardly makes us better off in comparison. If this be granted, then it becomes difficult to accept the anti-historicist claim (as discussed in White, 1966:123) that "only by disenthralling human intelligence from the sense of history [will] men be able to confront creatively the problems of the present." I think the opposite may indeed be the case: the failure of nations to profit from the lessons of the past should be seen more as a reflection of human limitations in properly utilizing insights gained from experience, than an inherent problem with the process of collective historical recollection. What seems clearly incontrovertible is the fact that the lack of a sense of history in individuals leads to their greater vulnerability vis-a-vis the forces and pressures of the present. A continuing awareness of history and historical change is necessary for them to better cope with the vicissitudes and perils of the present. Without a historical imagination individuals are more passive of being ensnared by ideological orthodoxy, of being manipulated and exploited by the

forces of the market, of being subjected to political authoritarianism. "If you don't know what happened behind you," said James Baldwin with great simplicity and lucidity, "you don't know what's happening around you."

Endnotes

1. It has been suggested (Poster, 1984:3) that by the 1960s Foucault's general receptiveness to (though, strictly speaking, not affiliation with) structuralist tendencies in the French intellectual scene (which Sartre loathed) was directly instrumental in his dissociation at that time from Sartre's existential Marxism and from the latter's reliance on the centered Subject and on the model of a totalizing history.

2. Hegel wrote that in its movement through time Spirit is "engulfed in the night of its own self-consciousness; its vanished existence is, however, conserved therein; and this superseded existence–the previous state, but born anew from the womb of knowledge, a new world, a new embodiment of the mode of Spirit" (cited in White, 1966:133).

3. Foucault does not mince words in his disavowal of being characterized as a structuralist. He refers to "certain 'half-witted' commentators [who] persist in labeling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis." (1973:xiv) .

4. In his magisterial *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Aries traces the evolution of the family "as an idea" (1962:9), that is to say, as a conception of a kinship arrangement, and explains the transformation of this conception as occasioned by conditions of industrialization and modernization. This developmental model was elaborated in reference to the historical origins and development of the idea of "childhood" in Western society. The analysis of the relationship between the

emerging societal recognition of childhood as a distinct and unique phase of the person's life, and the changing structure of the family, representing an accomodation to the new conception of and attitudes towards childhood, reveals Aries's approach to historical explanation, which depicts social change in terms of the interplay between social (i.e., institutional – in this case, involving the family) and psychosocial structures.

5. See discussion of existentialism in Beauvoir, Introduction to *The Second Sex*, (Western Civilization Reading Program, 1989:65-73).

6. The attempt to break away from a metaphysics of the Subject, of Consciousness, though first witnessed in this century in the work of Nietzsche and Freud, is found in more systematic fashion in the (mostly French) structuralist and poststructuralist writers (e.g., Lacan, Althusser, Levi-Strauss, Derrida), starting in the 1960s.

7. It may, of course, always be counterargued that all manner of analysis involves interpretation.

8. If such a line of thinking can be accepted as plausible, then Foucault's project might just be closer to existentialism than he cares to admit.

9. This formulation has Rousseauan as well as Durkheimian overtones – the former, for its implications of the greater freedom and security individuals ultimately acquire in the collectivity, by surrendering their unchecked freedom to the general will and well-being; the latter, for its investing social structure with a moral dimension, a moral force that becomes the very basis of legitimation of social life.

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