

# CULTURAL SOFTWARE

A THEORY OF IDEOLOGY

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A theory of ideology must offer some explanation of how the object of its study—whether beliefs, symbolic forms, discourse, or cultural software—has power over what individuals do and how they think. Thus the study of ideology is necessarily also a cratology—a study of power.

It is possible to have a social theory that ascribes no independent power to the understanding. One could argue that all behavior is structured by the economic or material base of society. Most theorists of ideology, however—including those within the Marxist tradition—have assumed that ideology is an important phenomenon precisely because the way that people understand the world causes them to act against their best interests or to behave unjustly to others.

Conversely, it is possible to have a social theory that overestimates the role of ideology in its theory of power. One might try to reduce military, economic, or technological power to ideological power by arguing that such power is exercised by individuals and groups who are themselves simply the product of ideological or discursive forces. But such a reductionist project is too simplistic. Although ways of thinking do have power over individuals, we must recognize that they do so in concert with many other forms of power that exist in society.

The theory of cultural software offers an account of ideological power. It is a theory of the power of understanding, and hence I call it a theory of hermeneutic power. But it is not a complete theory of power, because it focuses on the power over human beings created by their tools of understanding.

In discussing the relation of cultural software to ideological power, I shall use the work of Michel Foucault as my major foil. I do so because his theory of power/knowledge has been particularly influential, especially given the post-

modern turn from theories of ideology to theories of discourse. I shall argue that Foucault's theory of power/knowledge shares many of the same problems as previous theories of ideology, and I shall argue that the theory of cultural software offers a superior theory of power.

### The Study of Ideology as the Study of Power

Foucault's theory of power/knowledge rejects the very term *ideology*; it attempts to change the focus of inquiry to disciplines and practices of power. Foucault identified ideology with what he understood to be the traditional Marxist model. He objected to it on three different grounds. First, the Marxist model was tied to an unhelpful distinction between economic base and ideational superstructure.<sup>1</sup> Once this distinction was made, enormous efforts had to be expended in explaining their proper relationship. In contrast, Foucault argued that knowledge was inextricably intertwined with social systems of behavior. Knowledge arose out of disciplines of knowledge, so that there were various "knowledges" produced by social systems and enforced by their conventions of behavior. Thus one did not have to claim that ideas had power over individuals. Power lay in disciplines and practices, and knowledges themselves were just forms of disciplinary practice.

Second, Foucault objected to the Marxist model because it presupposed a subject who was somehow affected (or deluded) by ideology.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Foucault wanted to insist that there is no deeper, truer, or more authentic nature of subjects that ideology perverts or disguises; rather, to be a subject is to be created by the various disciplines and practices that exist in one's society.<sup>3</sup>

Third, Foucault believed that the Marxist model necessarily made a distinction between ideology and truth. But Foucault thought the proper focus of study should be the various discourses through which true and false statements can be made; these discourses themselves are neither true nor false.<sup>4</sup>

Foucault's general critique of ideology is really directed at a particular instantiation of the concept. None of his objections applies to all theories of ideology; in fact, many different versions either agree with or anticipate his claims. Many theories of ideology (like Geertz's and Thompson's), do not depend upon the Marxist distinction between base and superstructure, and many acknowledge the interrelationship between knowledge and social practice. Althusser's theory of ideology anticipates Foucault's claim that the subject is constituted by culture, as does Geertz's theory of ideology as a cultural system and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Finally, not all theories of ideology make a sharp distinction between ideology and truth; as discussed in Chapter 5, neutral conceptions of ideology by definition do not do so.

Thus, although Foucault's theories of disciplinary practice, discourse, and

power/knowledge purport to replace the concept of ideology, in fact they bear significant resemblances to many different theories of ideology. This is hardly surprising. As noted previously, Gadamer's theory of tradition, Barthes's notion of a semiotic system, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Wittgenstein's concept of a language game also bear significant resemblances to the basic concept of ideology, even if they differ among themselves in important respects. My point is not that ideology should be regarded as a master concept, with all others explained in terms of it, but rather that we should not be blinded by the different terminologies that various theorists use. Each of these theories is concerned with how language and culture have power over individuals' thoughts and actions. Thus one may speak loosely of Foucault's theory of ideology, even though Foucault himself would have rejected the word.

Moreover, although Foucault tried to distinguish himself from previous theorists of ideology and especially from Marx, his theories nevertheless face many of the same difficulties that other theories of ideology face. Even when one changes the focus from ideology to discourse, the basic issues underlying the theory of ideology—the evaluative stance of the analyst, the need for a conception of justice, the causes of ideological effects, the explanation of shared beliefs, the question of ontological commitments, and the problem of self-reference—do not vanish. They simply reappear in new guises.

Within the framework discussed in Chapter 5, Foucault's theories offer a neutral or nonevaluative conception. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he does not claim that one episteme is better than another, and in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* he does not assert that one disciplinary practice is superior to any other. He merely attempts to describe these systems of power and their effects on human beings, or, as he so often calls them, "bodies."

In Chapter 6 I argued that neutral conceptions of ideology ultimately cannot maintain their neutrality because one cannot really describe the effects of ways of thinking on people without evaluative and normative judgments. This point applies equally to Foucault's work. His studied neutrality in description is often merely an attempt to show that the conceptual systems and practices of the past cannot be condemned as easily as we might wish and that they throw an unsavory light on our own current systems and practices. By examining the forms of power/knowledge in the past, we can see how systems of power infiltrate our own lives today. Yet this philosophical *tu quoque* cannot be performed without a normative conception—in particular, a conception of justice.

On the other hand, Foucault's conception of a subject completely constructed by disciplinary practices raises the puzzling question of why one should even care about what happens to individual human beings if their very individuality is the result of social practice. If subjects are simply the intersection of

various disciplinary practices, if they are merely the mouthpieces for various forms of struggle directed by nobody in particular, it is hard to see why we should care about them and their fates. It may be true that bodies are manipulated, watched, cut into, inscribed, and tortured, but that is because they are objects in a never-ending game of power. We should no more feel sorry for these bodies and what happens to them than we should feel sorry for cartoon characters whose ways of thinking and behaving have been drawn by a cartoonist. Perhaps more important, even the sympathy we feel for the victims of surveillance, torture, and other disciplinary practices is simply due to the disciplinary practices of morality and sympathy that are the product of our own cultural moment. We are cartoons crying over the fate of other cartoons.

An analogous problem arises with truth. As Foucault argues, truth is something that arises within the particular discursive structure available to us in the culture in which we live. Different “games of truth” emerge at different points in history and these games cannot be compared in terms of superiority or inferiority, adequacy or inadequacy.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as Charles Taylor points out, a significant portion of Foucault’s project involves unmasking—he wishes to reveal the truth of power behind sanctimonious claims about truth, scientific inquiry, and professional rigor.<sup>6</sup> Yet the very idea of unmasking implies two things: first, it implies a reality behind surface appearances, and second, it implies a notion of truth that is not limited to our particular cultural moment.

Foucault’s insistence on unmasking the operations of power leads to the familiar problem of self-reference: When Foucault acts as ideological analyst, he discovers how power is exercised in a society by agents who do not understand these operations of power. Yet as Foucault himself would hardly deny, his own interests and his own researches are effects of power/knowledge. Thus he is in a position similar to the analysands he studies: his thought, as an effect of power/knowledge, may mask the power relations that constitute it. Like the subjects he studies, he may be blinded to the effects of power on his own thought and behavior. If so, his analyses of the operations of power in other societies (as well as his own) may be limited or distorted, or may miss the mark entirely, just as these subjects could not grasp the existence and effect of the power relations that constituted them.

Foucault’s view of the construction of subjectivity has been further criticized by Poulantzas and others on the grounds that it leaves no room for resistance.<sup>7</sup> In response, Foucault argued that resistance arises out of the regime of power itself and is never exterior to it. Indeed, Foucault argued, every regime of power creates its own resistances. Resistance is produced simultaneously with power, much as the back side of an object comes into being as soon as it has a front side. As Foucault says, resistances “are inscribed in [relations of power]



as an irreducible opposite.”<sup>8</sup> Thus resistance, rather than being impossible in a network or system of power relations, is in fact part and parcel of its existence.

This answer creates more problems than it solves. It seems at odds with Foucault’s general hostility to totalizing explanations of power, as well as his insistence that power works on many different conflicting and overlapping levels at once.<sup>9</sup> Despite this, Foucault’s solution to the problem of resistance is Parmenidean: there is only the One—the regime of power—and all resistance to the regime is actually part of the regime.<sup>10</sup> Like Parmenides, Foucault faces the problem of explaining change and motion. Parmenides solved this problem by holding that change and motion were illusions. Unfortunately, this is not a solution easily available to Foucault, because his genealogical method is designed to explain change.

In his writings, Foucault emphasizes that many alternative ways of thinking and living have been crushed underfoot by successive regimes of power/knowledge.<sup>11</sup> But this phenomenon is hard to square with his theory of resistance. Do these alternative ways of thinking and living offer resistance to the regimes of power/knowledge? If they are forms of resistance, then they should be preserved and encapsulated in the new system of power—indeed, they would already exist within it. If they are not preserved, we must assume that they are not the sort of resistance that Foucault’s theory explains. (In the alternative, perhaps these previous regimes offered no resistance at all.) In either case, Foucault has not really answered his critics. They want to know how combat with or resistance to a regime of power/knowledge is possible.

Just as Foucault’s theory of resistance does not show how an older regime can ever resist a newer one, his theory of resistance does not explain how a new regime can ever supplant or subjugate another that resists it. If the new regime of power replaces another, we must assume that it resists the regime of power currently in place; otherwise, it is difficult to see how it could overcome it. But if it offers resistance, it must already be contained in the existing regime. Hence a new regime of power is impossible. We thus have the curious result that although Foucault speaks of “subjugated knowledges” in his essays on power/knowledge, his theory of resistance gives us no explanation of how they were ever subjugated.<sup>12</sup>

One possible reply to these objections is to revert to a form of humanism. The above arguments assume that networks, regimes, or strategies of power can offer resistance to other networks, regimes, or strategies of power, when in fact only people offer resistance to networks of power. But this resurrection of the individual subject as the locus and source of resistance is unavailable to Foucault. Rather, he would have to acknowledge that resistance is a network of relationships, strategies, and behaviors, just as power is. That is why he is

able to hold that the structure of resistance is built into the structure of power.<sup>13</sup>

Parmenides' doctrine of the One was defended by his fellow Eleatic Zeno, who created a series of paradoxes to show that motion and thus change were impossible. In Foucault's case, however, similar paradoxes would be quite unwelcome, for a modern-day Zeno would use Foucault's doctrine of resistance to show that change in a regime of power is impossible. No regime can ever change into another because no regime can ever be faced with resistance exterior to it that could transform it or overthrow it.

In his archaeological period Foucault claimed that one episteme miraculously transformed into another almost overnight. Given the problems that flow from his theory of resistance, the necessity of making this amazing claim seems more understandable. Foucault could not have asserted that one episteme changed gradually into another, because this would mean that resistance to the episteme could arise from outside the episteme. In any case, Foucault offered his theory of resistance not during his archaeological period but during his genealogical period, when he had seemingly abandoned the structural coherence and totalization of archaeological explanations. Nevertheless, the totalizing character of this theory of resistance is more consistent with the spirit of his earlier work.

In fact, Foucault's theory of resistance is inconsistent with his genealogical approach. His theory of genealogy argues that changes occur from a collision of contending forces or strategies. These conflicts emerge like armies that suddenly find themselves facing each other in a clearing and are thrown into battle.<sup>14</sup> Foucault's theory of resistance, on the other hand, is premised on a closed system in which the structure of resistance is already contained in power relationships. But a genealogical system cannot be such a closed system. It must be the result of evolutionary mechanisms activated by chance events and unexpected changes, invasions, modifications and intrusions. Thus if Foucault is to retain his genealogical approach, he must give up his Parmenidean theory of resistance.

A final difficulty with Foucault's theory of power and knowledge concerns the cognitive mechanisms of knowledge involved in relations of power. Because Foucault identifies knowledge and power with practices, he directs all of his attention to outward manifestations of culture. To be sure, Foucault is not a behaviorist, and he does not appear to have a behaviorist theory of the mind. The problem is rather that Foucault does not seem to have any theory of internal mental processes or cognitive structures. Thus there is a sense in which Foucault is not simply antihumanist, he is also "anticognitivist." First, he pays little attention to mechanisms of cognition and understanding. Second, he writes as if operations of power work exclusively through practices and disci-

plines that are applied to human bodies. Thus he writes as if power arises out of behavior and activity rather than from mechanisms of cognition.

Two features of Foucault's work reflect and reinforce this comparative neglect. The first is his claim that discourses and disciplinary practices constitute the subject. Because these discourses and practices are embodied in technology, symbolic forms, and external behaviors, Foucault does not ask how the mind is in fact constructed by them. He simply takes for granted that mechanisms of socialization and cognition supply whatever is necessary for disciplines of power/knowledge to have their requisite effects.

Nevertheless, disciplines and practices cannot have these effects unless they are understood and internalized by individuals with a cognitive apparatus. Social construction on the order that Foucault proposes requires elaborate mechanisms of understanding that must perform a great deal of work in shaping and constituting the individual's identity and thought. Foucault's account lacks any description or concern with these internal cognitive processes. This criticism should not be confused with a claim that Foucault denies that subjectivity is constituted by culture, or by processes of shared meanings, or even by language. He advocates all of these things. Nevertheless, he wants to advocate all of them without reference to how each individual processes information, or to what is going on inside her head. His view of culture is largely external—it consists in symbolic forms, statements, technologies, architectures, and behaviors.

Foucault's recurrent use of the image of the "body" to refer to human beings also reflects his relative lack of interest in internal mental states. He often speaks of disciplines of the body and of things being done to the body.<sup>15</sup> Foucault's "body" is a metonym for a human being. His use of the term has the obvious rhetorical effect of depersonalizing and defamiliarizing human interaction. But it also has the ideological effects of a metonymic model, as discussed in Chapter 11.

The metonym "the body for the human being" identifies the whole with the part. A metonymic model "*B* for *A*" understands *A* in terms of *B* and hence may confuse properties of *B* with those of *A*. Simultaneously, it suppresses relevant differences between the two. For Foucault, disciplinary power is what happens to bodies: how they are cataloged, inscribed, separated, or gathered together in time and space, how regimens of behavior are prescribed for them, and so on. The problem with this metonym is that bodies can not understand, internalize, or carry out social practices. Bodies do not practice disciplines or devise strategies for dealing with other bodies. In short, bodies cannot understand and cannot act meaningfully, although human beings can. Bodies can be the objects of power/knowledge, but they cannot be its agents—they can be acted upon, but they cannot perform the necessary meaningful actions that sustain a regime of power. Somebody has to be doing something to all of these

bodies. The question is who. The answer is a human being with a particular cognitive apparatus, with historically generated tools of understanding. Expressed in terms of our catalogue of ideological effects, Foucault's emphasis on discourse and practice projects the study of cultural understanding outside of mental processes and onto behaviors, symbols, and cultural artifacts. This leaves only a body that is subjected to these external influences, and a system of power that is "intentional but nonsubjective."<sup>16</sup>

Thus Foucault's recurrent metonym of the body unwittingly symbolizes one of the most serious problems of his theory of power. The fundamental difference between understanding human beings as bodies and understanding them as human beings concerns their cognitive processes—their ability to understand and process information and their ability to engage in behavior that has and is understood to have meaning. Foucault's regimes of power/knowledge cannot get off the ground without the cognitive apparatus that makes human beings more than bodies. His theory of power/knowledge thus lacks an account of how the understanding exercises power over the subject.

Foucault's theory also faces the problem of ontology that I described in Chapter 1. For Foucault, epistemes, disciplines, and practices serve the same function as an Objective Spirit or a collective consciousness. They exist over and above individual human beings and are the source of power over them. We might even think of them as "material" versions of these well-worn concepts. Foucault has rid himself of idealism, but he has simply re-created the same Hegelian or Durkheimian formula at a behavioral or material level.

Finally, Foucault faces a problem of differentiation. Foucault's reliance on epistemes, disciplines, and practices explains and enforces uniformity, but at the price of suppressing and failing to explain individual differences in understanding and behavior. Differences among individual understanding and individual behavior are left unexplained or are ignored within the mode of explanation that Foucault offers. Thus his is the most puzzling of genealogies: it is a genealogy without individual variation, which is, in evolutionary explanation, the engine of change.

An important shift in Foucault's work occurs between the first and second volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. In the introduction to the second volume, Foucault suddenly announces that he is shifting course. This change can best be summarized as a movement from disciplines of the body to technologies of the self. The change is not merely terminological. It is in many respects a fundamental reorientation. Rather than asking how social processes arose that did things to human bodies, Foucault now asks how subjects came to understand themselves as selves—how they developed techniques for understanding their place in the social order and the principles of proper conduct within it.<sup>17</sup> This is the question of how an individual comes to recognize his (in volumes

2 and 3 it is almost always a man) ethical duties toward others and appropriate sexual relationships with others.

The sudden shift between volumes 1 and 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, so late in Foucault's career, dramatizes what had been missing in his theory of ideology: the need to understand the processes of ideology from the self's point of view. Thus, Foucault argues, he must now study "the games of truth by which human beings came to see themselves as desiring individuals."<sup>18</sup>

In the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault rediscovers the individual subject long buried beneath his concern with disciplinary practices. Yet his shift to a "hermeneutics of the self" makes all the more urgent the need to understand ideological phenomena in cognitive as well as behavioral terms.<sup>19</sup>

The problems that I have identified with Foucault's theory of power are interrelated. His account of the creation of subjectivity through disciplines and practices must be supplemented by an account of how power arises through the development of cognitive processes and tools of understanding. He needs an account of how power is created through the act of individual understanding, and how this power produces both intersubjective convergence and individual variation in understanding. In other words, to offer a theory of ideological power, one needs to solve the problems of ontology, causation, and differentiation that I posed in Chapter 1. Because Foucault has no satisfactory solution to these problems, his theory of power is also incomplete.

### Cultural Software and Power/Knowledge

The theory of cultural software outlined in the preceding chapters is concerned with precisely these matters. It tries to explain the power exercised over individuals because and to the extent that they employ various tools of understanding to get about the world, interact with others, and express their values. Because this form of power arises from the operations of understanding itself, I call it hermeneutic power.

Hermeneutic power should not be confused with the many other forms of power (and forms of violence) that exist in a given society. Hermeneutic power causes us to feel the force of cultural symbols and codes and to behave in accordance with these codes. It bears important relations to other kinds of social power, and other kinds of social power make use of it. But it is not identical with them.

Because his focus is outward to the world of behaviors and practices, Foucault's theory of power/knowledge lacks an adequate account of hermeneutic power. The theory of cultural software can provide such an account. This theory has much in common with Foucault's concept of power/knowledge.

First, it offers a genealogical account of cultural development. Second, it asserts that ideological power arises from the nature of subjectivity; it argues that power is implicated in the very acts of knowing and understanding. Third, it holds that power arises from relationships of communication. Fourth, it emphasizes that hermeneutic power is ubiquitous.

The development of the tools of understanding through conceptual bricolage is consistent with Foucault's notion of genealogy. That is because Foucault's "genealogy" is simply another version of the fundamental insight of the philosophy of culture: that much of human culture is the product of the unintended consequences of human action. Although Foucault identifies the idea of genealogy with Nietzsche, his application of it also owes much to Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage. In fact, a theory of genealogy is really a theory of bricolage, because it assumes that existing features of culture will be put to new and unintended uses, with new and unexpected effects and developments. Thus when Foucault claims that the genealogist discovers "the secret that [things] have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms," he is describing the process of conceptual bricolage in a different way.<sup>20</sup>

Like Foucault and Althusser, the theory of cultural software argues that ideological power is created by and exercised through the formation of individual subjectivity. The power of cultural software is the power that software has over a person who is partially constituted by that software, who is the person she is because of the software that she possesses. Thus cultural software has power over people because it constitutes people; it produces ideological effects in society because people must make use of it in order to act in society.

The hermeneutic power involved in ideological effects is simply a special case of the power that cultural software has over individuals generally. In essence, the entire previous discussion of ideological effects has been concerned with the mechanisms of ideological power. In previous chapters we have seen how many of the basic tools of cultural understanding that we inevitably and necessarily employ in our understanding of the social world—heuristics, narratives, metaphors, categories, and networks of conceptual associations—shape our thoughts and hence our actions in important ways. Whenever we offer an account of an ideological mechanism, we also explain how it produces power over our imaginations. Thus, within the theory of cultural software, the connections between understanding and power—between ideology and cratology—are fundamental.

Ideological power is an inevitable consequence of the operations of subjectivity, because hermeneutic power is an inevitable consequence of being a person existing in a culture at a particular moment in history. Because individuals must understand the social world through use of their cultural software, they

are inevitably subjected to various forms of hermeneutic power merely by existing as persons equipped with and constituted by cultural software. Each act of cultural understanding is a potential source of ideological power over the individual because each act of understanding is a source of hermeneutic power over the individual. Hermeneutic power, and hence ideological power, is not something wholly imposed on a subject from without; it results from the interaction of the social world with a subject already programmed to receive information in a certain way. As Stanley Fish notes, the force of ideology is not an external force, and ideological power does not operate like a gun at your head. There is no gun at your head: "The gun at your head is your head."<sup>21</sup>

Because individuals are constituted by their cultural software, they are continually immersed in forms of hermeneutic power without noticing it. Thus Foucault's claim about the ubiquity of disciplinary power is also true of the hermeneutic power of cultural software. Take, for example, cultural codes concerning dress. Cultural understandings of appropriate and attractive dress expect women to wear high heels in certain situations. For some, these cultural expectations are oppressive, but they are oppressive in part precisely because they are internalized—the individual feels that she is being forced by community expectations to dress in ways she would rather not. But if a particular individual does not mind wearing high heels and even thinks that they make her look more attractive, she does not feel oppressed or disempowered by the cultural codes that require them.

We may make a partial analogy to the forces of nature. When a swimmer swims with the ocean tide, she does not necessarily feel the tide as a force. Nor do we feel the force of the air that presses against us, unless there is a sudden drop or increase in pressure that produces wind. Nor do we feel the inertial force of the earth's accelerated motion around the sun (produced by a gravitational force), or the solar system's motion within the galaxy. By analogy we might think of hermeneutic power (and ideological power) as a sort of background power that we live within, a power that is constitutive of our everyday existence. Like normal air pressure or the acceleration of the earth around the sun, it is a necessary albeit unnoticed element of our lives, a background force that accompanies and produces our life on Earth. We do not feel the force of the various background forms of ideological power until we oppose them in certain ways. Then we are like a swimmer who tries to swim against the tide and suddenly feels its strength.

The example of air pressure is important for another reason: not only do we not notice normal air pressure but our bodies are designed to operate correctly only within tolerable deviances from this normality. If air pressure becomes too little or too great, we cannot survive. To continue the analogy, there

may be an important sense in which hermeneutic power is not felt in ordinary circumstances partly because our ability to participate in a culture or a shared set of conventions or expectations requires this power to be present. Without this force, our culture, and our cultural identities, could not long survive. The power of cultural software binds members of a culture together and makes following, participating, and developing cultural conventions possible. The fact that this power can be used for good or for ill does not change the fact of its ubiquity; its capacity for good or bad use is implicit in the ambivalent conception of cultural software.

### Cultural Software as an Alternative to Power/Knowledge

Although the theory of cultural software bears many similarities to the Foucauldian approach, it also has important differences. These differences resolve the problems that I have previously identified with the Foucauldian model of power/knowledge.

The theory of cultural software differs from Foucault's theory of power/knowledge in six ways. First, the theory emphasizes that disciplines and technologies of power cannot come into being or be sustained without cognitive mechanisms of understanding. Second, the theory of cultural software is overtly normative and evaluative; it presupposes an idea of justice that subjects the analyst's own beliefs to scrutiny. Third, it provides a catalogue of cognitive mechanisms involved in the constitution of subjectivity and hermeneutic power. Fourth, because the theory locates the source of hermeneutic power in each person's individualized tools of understanding, it does not need to postulate a version, whether material or otherwise, of a collective consciousness or an Objective Spirit. Fifth, for the same reasons, it does not need to assume that all forms of resistance are already contained within a larger system of power. Sixth, because the theory is premised on an ambivalent rather than a neutral or pejorative conception of ideology, it can acknowledge cultural software both as a source of power over individuals and as a source of individual autonomy. In this way it escapes the excesses of Foucault's antihumanist conception.

Foucault explains power through outward manifestations in behavior and practice. The theory of cultural software emphasizes how processes of understanding produce power; it argues that power arises out of cognitive mechanisms as well as out of technology and social practices. In the first chapter I noted that without cultural software our technology becomes useless and our institutions fall apart. One can make the same point about Foucault's disciplines. Disciplines require the existence of cultural software to support and make meaningful the practices and techniques of normalization. Technologies of power require and presuppose cultural software.



Unlike Foucault's histories, the ideological analysis of cultural software does not purport to be nonevaluative. It rests on an ambivalent conception of ideology. As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, this conception necessarily depends upon an idea of justice that can be used to critique the analyst's own views as well as those of the analysand. As we have seen, Foucault's theory of power/knowledge purports to be neutral, but it is really pejorative. The normative bite of his analysis stems from the horror at watching our lives completely constituted by ever tightening chains of power. Foucault's theory has all of the problems that attend nonevaluative theories of ideology: he cannot describe what he wants to describe without taking some sort of normative stand about what is true and what is just.<sup>22</sup>

### Mechanisms of Hermeneutic Power

Unlike Foucault and his emphasis on external practices and disciplines, the theory of cultural software offers a series of mechanisms that describe how subjectivity is shaped and constituted and how acts of understanding exercise power over the individual imagination. Hermeneutic power over our subjectivity occurs in four ways.

First, cultural software has power over individuals simply because it enables understanding. Enabling and limiting are two sides of the same coin. To enable understanding is always to enable it in certain ways rather than in others. This empowerment opens up certain possibilities for conception and understanding while foreclosing others, in the same way that biological evolution creates possibilities for morphological development by foreclosing others. For example, the historical development of animal structures meant that locomotion would occur through the development of legs but not through the development of wheels.<sup>23</sup> The development of reason through history is the development of certain mental structures, but not all structures can coexist simultaneously. Some ways of thinking may not be possible given the tools available at a particular time. Hence the development of cultural software always directs thought in some ways rather than others; it always makes some kinds of understanding easier than others, and it makes still others impossible given the tools that lie to hand.

Not only is the enabling of understanding a kind of limitation, but understanding itself presupposes a certain kind of structure and hence a certain kind of limitation. As Gadamer points out, in order to understand, we need preconceptions and prejudgments.<sup>24</sup> These preconceptions and prejudgments not only affect our understanding, they undergird it; without them, we cannot understand anything at all. Stanley Fish puts it succinctly: an open mind is an empty mind.<sup>25</sup> To understand, one needs tools, but these tools are necessarily

better designed for some tasks than for others, just as an automobile is better employed for driving than for brain surgery. Thus cultural software enables by disabling: it opens possibilities for understanding by foreclosing others; it expands our minds by limiting them; it manufactures judgment through partiality; it creates personal freedom through mental regulation; it produces the possibility of insight from a necessary blindness.

Second, cultural software has power over individuals because we come to depend upon it, not only for getting about the world but for our very identities as individuals. Cultural software not only allows us to understand but in doing so helps produce the “we” who understands.

In some respects, the power of cultural software is similar to the power that all tools have over those who regularly employ them and hence come to rely on them. We might offer a partial analogy to our increasing dependence on technology. Our technological tools have a certain power over us because they allow us to do things that we could not otherwise do without them. Because they enable us, we come to depend more and more on them. We use them to perform the tasks of everyday life—indeed, we define the meaning of “everyday life” and our expectations of the normal and the ordinary increasingly in terms of what our technology allows us to do. In this way our technology becomes woven into the fabric of everyday expectations and everyday existence. We fully recognize the power that our technology has over our lives only when it breaks down or malfunctions. A stalled car, a power outage, a crashed computer, or a dead telephone line bring forcefully home how greatly our lives assume and depend upon the existence and availability of certain forms of technology.

Nevertheless, the power and effect of cultural software over subjectivity is, if anything, even more profound. Persons are constituted by their cultural software in a way in which they are not constituted by their cars, their telephones, their bank accounts, or their Xerox machines. One’s cultural software cannot be cast aside as easily as one can sell a car, break a Cuisinart, or lose money in the stock market. The tools of understanding cannot be discarded at will. As we noted earlier, even when we attempt to be unbiased or to engage in critical self-inquiry, we are not really discarding our tools of understanding; rather, we are using some of them to think about the adequacy of others, or about themselves.

To be sure, there is an important sense in which personhood includes one’s property and one’s uses of technology; technology does help constitute us as the people we are. We might even expand our definition of “person” to include a person’s possessions and access to technology. But technology does not (yet) seem as fundamentally constitutive of personhood as does cultural software. We use technology instrumentally to further our ends, but our use of cultural

software is more than instrumental, for the person who uses cultural software is partly the thing she uses. Instrumentality usually presupposes a person who employs an instrument. But this person does not come into being until she is constituted by her cultural software. Thus we might say that cultural software is also preinstrumental, in that it creates the conditions for what could constitute an instrumental use of cultural software as well as technology.

Third, power over the subject occurs through the act of change in our understanding that occurs through understanding itself. To understand, we must process information, and this means that we must open ourselves up to the possibility of new experiences and the influence of other persons. To understand is to be susceptible to learning, or—less benignly expressed—to reprogramming. One cannot avoid this possibility; it is a precondition of understanding. To risk understanding is to risk change through understanding, and there is no guarantee that the change will not in some cases be for the worse.

Fourth, the process of understanding through cultural software can have power over us even without significantly altering our cultural software. Ideological power can also arise from the manipulation of our existing cultural software that occurs when we understand others. To risk understanding is to risk not only change but also manipulation. The most obvious example is advertising. Sometimes advertising attempts to forge new associations (Pepsi-Cola with being young and having fun, for example), but at other times it merely exploits the associations that we already have. In the latter case, it does not so much rewrite our cultural software as pander to it. It attempts to “push our buttons”—to invoke powerful images and associations that we already possess in order to cause us to act in certain ways. But advertising is only the most extreme and visible example of a general phenomenon. Communication and the understanding of communication always presuppose the possibility of manipulation. Indeed, what we pejoratively call manipulation is only a special case of a general feature of communication and understanding. Symbols and rhetoric always make use of an audience’s cultural software—the common associations, heuristics, and metaphors of individual understanding within a culture—to persuade or otherwise affect behavior.

Obviously, the line between the third and fourth forms of hermeneutic power—between changing our cultural software and manipulating it—is hardly clear-cut. Indeed, we would not expect it to be. A person’s new tools of understanding must be made out of her old ones. If we assume that all of our communicative experiences have some effect, however slight, on our hermeneutic apparatus, then the line between change and manipulation of our cultural software may be one of degree rather than kind.

## The Economy of Hermeneutic Power

Because the theory of cultural software locates the source of hermeneutic power in each person's individualized tools of understanding, it does not need the sort of problematic explanation of resistance that Foucault provided. In particular, it does not need to assume that all forms of resistance are already contained in a larger system of power.

The theory of cultural software does not view individuals as the products of networks of hermeneutic power but rather understands networks of power as the result of interactions between individuals with similar (though not identical) cultural software. This software in turn is continually written and re-written through these interactions. As described in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, this process creates an economy of exchange and development that regulates similarity of understandings while also producing variation and differentiation. Just as we saw earlier that a *Zeitgeist* or a "spirit of the age" is an effect of the economy of cultural software, so, too, are the networks of hermeneutic power that exist at any time in society. Because the source of hermeneutic power over the individual lies in each person's individualized cultural software, we do not need to dissolve the subject into some larger set of forces in order to explain social power. Nor do we have to postulate some version, whether material or otherwise, of an Objective Spirit, a collective consciousness, or an episteme that ensures that common social understandings are shared and enforced.

We should distinguish this picture from Foucault's claim in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* that power exists at various macro and micro levels that are constantly interacting.<sup>26</sup> Foucault's division of different kinds of power is not a reassertion of the individual subject. Rather, Foucault argues that various strategies, disciplines, and practices can exist at larger and smaller levels, in more general and more local spaces, and that the larger and more general forms of power may opportunistically take advantage of the smaller and more local forms in place, even as they can also be said to be produced by them. The interaction that he contemplates is an interaction not between human beings within an economy of power but between different levels or forms of power that produce human beings. Human beings as autonomous agents still do not exist in his system.

Antihumanist accounts like Foucault's are attractive because they appear to simplify the process of guaranteeing intersubjective agreement and shared understandings. Antihumanism responds to an underlying fear in social theory: the fear that the human mind is too private, too closed off, too inaccessible to other minds to explain the shared features of our existence. On the other hand, if culture creates individuals rather than the other way around, if the individual is just the intersection of cultural forces, the problem of intersubjectivity van-

ishes. Yet it is only replaced by new difficulties. The problem now becomes how to explain differentiation and disagreement, or, in Foucault's terms, resistance.

This difficulty highlights the comparative advantages of the theory of cultural software. We are all participants in the economy of cultural software. Each of us is continually engaged in writing and rewriting our own cultural software and the cultural software of others. Thus the problem of accounting for dissimilarity and resistance, which so troubled Foucault's theory of power/knowledge, does not arise. Resistance is guaranteed by the fact that each of us is an individual with unique cultural software. This economy of exchange simultaneously produces similarities and proliferates differences.

Individuals exist in fields of hermeneutic power, continually absorbing and sending out information to one another, continually exchanging memes that travel from one host to the next like viruses, mutating and developing as they spread. Unpalatable as this metaphor may be, it nevertheless emphasizes how limited the privacy of our thinking process really is. The concerns that motivated antihumanism turn out to be exaggerated; for in society we discover not a group of individual minds isolated from each other but a network of nodes of memetic transfer and cultural communication through which information continually flows. We find people constantly connected to others directly or indirectly, constantly assailed by messages, idea-programs, instructions, and signs, constantly exposed to a host of attempts to rewrite or otherwise manipulate their cultural software. The memes in our minds are continually being invaded by memes from elsewhere, and they have constructed elaborate defenses to deal with this constant assault. The amount of hermeneutic power, like the air pressure around us, is enormous, even if it is largely unfelt.

Our inherent susceptibility to change and intersubjective regulation comes from the same features of human existence that have made us susceptible to ever new forms of memetic invasion. As noted in Chapter 3, our ability to absorb informational symbionts may have had distinct evolutionary advantages. Once memes began to spread and take over human minds, however, they paved the way for the absorption and spread of ever new varieties. Precisely because people became good at internalizing memes that might help them, it also became possible for human beings to absorb memes that were neutral or even harmful to their emerging interests as persons. Thousands of years of human civilization have not altered this basic predicament.

There is an interesting connection between this memetic account of our susceptibility and Gadamer's ontological hermeneutics. Gadamer argues that in order to understand we must open ourselves to the possibility of change in our own beliefs.<sup>27</sup> One can reinterpret this account of hermeneutic openness in terms of hermeneutic power. Understanding requires openness to the object

of understanding, which requires employment of cultural software to absorb the information we find in the object. As a result, understanding involves susceptibility to the resulting effects produced on our cultural software. Openness is vulnerability, and vulnerability is susceptibility to hermeneutic power. Conversely, susceptibility and vulnerability are preconditions of cultural understanding. To risk understanding is to risk a certain kind of memetic invasion, which can sometimes reconfigure and readjust the memes that we have already internalized.

Thus the economy of cultural software operates effectively because understanding itself is a source of power over the individual. We ordinarily think of understanding in terms of mastery and hence control. Yet this mastery is also a form of vulnerability. For example, there is an old saying that the study of law sharpens the mind by narrowing it. There is much truth in this: legal education does change individuals who enter law schools; they gain knowledge and mastery over certain skills, but at the same time their ways of thinking are altered. They submit to a certain form of reprogramming as the price of their mastery and control.

Because understanding requires the possibility of changes in ourselves, it can be transformative even as it produces new skills and new forms of knowledge. The process of understanding is invasive in the deepest way, for it offers the possibility that we will become different from what we are now through our acts of understanding. The converse is also the case: people may resist understanding precisely to avoid change. The theory of cognitive dissonance argues that people sometimes try not to understand things because the new information threatens their sense of themselves. Information and new experience can change the self, and by changing it, disturb it. Dissonance arises when the self senses a threat to its self-conception. We might even think of some varieties of dissonance reduction as ways for the self to fail at understanding as a kind of self-defense. By selectively remembering events and disregarding recalcitrant evidence, the self attempts to resist changes to the self system that might occur if information were accepted and assimilated into the self and its tools of understanding. The phenomenon of dissonance reduction is evidence of the potential power that change through understanding has over the self, just as some astronomers think that the brilliant light of quasars is evidence of an enormous gravitational pull exercised by a black hole.

Our potential for change through understanding is essential to cultural understanding. Moreover, our ability to participate in culture or in shared conventions or expectations requires that we be susceptible to hermeneutic power. First, our cultural software produces the hermeneutic power that binds members of a culture together and makes following, participating, and developing cultural conventions possible. Second, in order for conventions to be shared,

cultural software must be replicated in members of a culture in a way that allows them to coordinate their activities in cultural conventions, whether this coordination turns out to be benign or malignant. Third, in order to reproduce cultural software in others, people must be able to rewrite one another's cultural software through acts of communication. That is how education proceeds. Thus not only is cultural understanding potentially transformative, it is necessarily so—the transformative features of understanding are necessary for the reproduction, growth, and development of culture.

As a shared way of living and thinking, culture is made possible by our ability to assimilate (and thus be changed by) new meme complexes. Just as we can survive only if we ingest foreign substances into our body as food, so, too, our culture can survive only if our cultural software can be rewritten through interaction with others. Both food and culture enter into us; in normal circumstances, we no more notice the invasiveness of cultural understanding than we do the invasiveness of food. All of this changes, however, when people fear an inappropriate influence or a bad effect from their exposure (or the exposure of others) to certain forms of communication. Then they may fear this communication just as they fear exposure to a poison or a carcinogen in the food they have taken into their bodies.

### Hermeneutic Subjection as a Source of Freedom

The economy and distribution of cultural software has important consequences for our conception of individual freedom within a culture. Cultural software is both a source of power over individuals and a source of individual autonomy.

There is a significant temptation to move from the insight that human beings are socially constructed to the assertion that they are socially determined. The picture presented here—of an economy and distribution of cultural software—is social constructivist but not social determinist or antihumanist. Individuals manipulate and rewrite each other's cultural software while themselves being affected (and enabled) by their own cultural software. Thus individuals are both the agents and objects of hermeneutic power. This power does not occur “from the top down” but through a continual process of interaction between individuals, or between individuals and the symbolic forms created by other individuals.

Through acts of communication, individuals mutually participate in hermeneutic power. They are both the purveyors and the objects of this power. Those who can manipulate the forms of our social understanding can gain power over us because they can manipulate or alter the very conditions of our understanding of the social world. On the other hand, they can employ this power only because they, too, are subject to it. They can use cultural software

to persuade others only because they themselves can be persuaded; they can manipulate others only because they themselves are potential subjects of manipulation.

Individual autonomy and subjection to hermeneutic power are two sides of the same coin. Autonomy within culture means the ability to articulate one's values and act according to one's desires. But this is done through cultural software; hence it is done using the very means through which one is subjected to hermeneutic power. Hermeneutic power simultaneously facilitates autonomy and subjection.

This conclusion is consistent with an ambivalent conception of ideology. Understanding involves a kind of power over the self, but not all such power is malignant, just as not all communication is manipulation and not all instruction is brainwashing. Some aspects of hermeneutic power are cooperative and beneficial; others are harmful and deleterious. But the difference between the helpful and the harmful, the enabling and the limiting, is not a difference between that which produces hermeneutic power over the individual and that which does not. Rather, both what we call maturation, or mastery, or freedom, or autonomy and what we call delusion or limitation involve the power of cultural software.

Foucault argued that we should not see truth and power as necessary opposites; hence we can be oppressed by socially constructed "games of truth." In contrast, I contend that we should not maintain a false opposition between the freedom of an individual and hermeneutic power over that individual. Ordinarily we assume that an individual lacks autonomy to the extent and to the degree that someone or something has power over her. Hence the power that cultural software exercises over individuals must be a power that denies them autonomy. This line of reasoning seems to lead us ineluctably from social construction to social determinism and antihumanism. Yet hermeneutic power operates differently. Hermeneutic power and autonomy do not constitute a zero-sum game. The ability to decide, to understand, to interact with others, to articulate and express one's values are all hallmarks of individual autonomy. Yet all of these features are developed through cultural software, which is to say that they are developed by being subject to various forms of hermeneutic power. Being a subject of cultural software—which means being subject to various forms of hermeneutic power—creates degrees of freedom. Hence our attitude toward the development of cultural software must be ambivalent rather than negative. To understand is to be given, at one and the same time, new tools of potential understanding and new chains of potential enslavement, and the two are not easily separated.

Foucault also offers a theory of the productive nature of cultural power, but its contours and consequences are quite different. In *The History of Sexuality*,



Foucault argues that power is positive rather than prohibitory. Power does not merely repress subjectivity but actively shapes and produces it. Relations of “bio-power” produce human personality, desire, and preference rather than simply stifling or blocking them. Relations of power create new expectations and hence possibilities of social interaction and social behavior. Thus the human subject is produced by power rather than being merely subject to its prohibitions. Even the human subject’s notions of freedom and liberation are products of this disciplinary power.<sup>28</sup>

Although Foucault says that power is positive and productive, he does not mean that it is positive in the sense of being a good thing or promoting human freedom. Rather, he believes that as forms of discipline and discourse proliferate, they increasingly entangle us more deeply in webs of bio-power. Thus Foucault offers a pejorative conception of the positive production of power. His view is akin to Max Weber’s dread of the iron cage of bureaucracy, or Heidegger’s concern about the advance of technology.

Foucault offers as an example of his thesis the development of discourses on sexuality. These discourses did not eliminate sexuality as a concern; quite the contrary, they have made sex increasingly important to us. The secrecy and regulation implicit in sexual repression is merely a tactic in a larger strategy. Sex was made a secret so that we might discuss it constantly, devote enormous energies to examining our sexual motives and urges, and devise, prescribe, and follow different regimens of conduct to ensure that our sexual desires were appropriately and effectively channeled. Hence Foucault says that sexuality is “deployed” as one would deploy a set of forces or supplies for battle. Through the deployment of sexuality, the discourses of sexuality proliferate. As they proliferate, they become a more and more pervasive part of our lives, even in our most determined efforts to keep sex a secret or to regulate it. Indeed, the more effort we put into regulating sexuality, the more important it becomes, and the more we must discuss it and those things related to it.

Even attempts to liberate ourselves from the forms of overt sexual repression are just another method of proliferating sexual discourse. Foucault claims that the notion of liberation presupposes the discovery of a deeper, truer self that is freed to express its real desires. Yet this conception is a sham: the very idea of a deeper truer sexual self is itself the product and the effect of the regime of bio-power. The discourses of sexuality create both the idea of the deeper self and the social apparatus that appears to suppress its “true” nature.

Thus, for Foucault, cultural proliferation is not a means of increasing freedom but rather a means of increasing submission and control over bodies. Even our ideas of liberation are just another ruse, just another opportunity for bio-power to infiltrate our lives.

The concept of proliferation is central to Foucault’s argument about power.

It has obvious analogies in the world of technology and institutions. Technologies proliferate, because technological developments create new needs and new frustrations and lead to new forms and combinations of technological innovations. Similarly, as Weber recognized, institutions proliferate, creating increasingly complicated institutional frameworks.

Once again, although Foucault's description of proliferation appears to be merely descriptive and nonevaluative, his view of cultural proliferation is essentially pejorative. The result of the proliferation of discourses is the Foucauldian nightmare: an ever tightening network of power exercised over human beings.

Foucault's account of cultural proliferation betrays the deficiencies of a pejorative conception of ideology. His analysis is unidirectional and ignores the problem of self-reference. He gives us no account of how he has been able to recognize and unmask the proliferating devices of power that have fooled everyone else. He cannot explain how he has been liberated to recognize that discourses of liberation are delusory.

In contrast, an ambivalent conception recognizes that the proliferation of culture and cultural tools facilitates and constitutes human autonomy as well as human bondage. An ambivalent conception can explain how Foucault as ideological analyst could comprehend what is happening to him. Among the tools of understanding produced by cultural proliferation are those that allow us (and in particular Foucault) to understand the proliferation of cultural power.

An ambivalent conception does not paint a uniformly rosy picture of culture. It appears optimistic only when contrasted to the Foucauldian nightmare. Once again, an analogy to technological proliferation may prove helpful. We might argue that the proliferation of telephones and the technologies to which they have given rise has thoroughly infiltrated and altered our lives, changed our conceptions of privacy and good manners, and created new ways for us to be harmed (telephone advertisements, anonymous threats, obscene phone calls, and wiretapping, to name a few examples). Moreover, it has subjected us to an ever tightening set of expectations concerning our accessibility to the communicative demands of others. It has produced a need, a desire, and a responsibility to be accessible to others, including supervisors, coworkers, and clients, as well as family and friends. This insatiable demand for accessibility has led to the development of pagers, mobile phones, and cellular units that allow individuals to be in contact with and thus at the beck and call of anyone at any time. Hence we might conclude that the proliferation of this technology has led to an accelerating enslavement of mankind.

This is a pejorative account of technological proliferation. Although accurate in many respects, it is nevertheless incomplete. An ambivalent view of

technological proliferation would note all of these problems. Yet it would also recognize that the development of telephone technology has had definite advantages. It has brought people closer together, saved lives, lowered costs, facilitated the exchange of information, and made possible many of the desirable features of social life that we take for granted today. Unfortunately, the benefits of this proliferation have not come without the costs noted above. Indeed, the two have arisen together, and they are not easily separated. We may attempt to ameliorate these problems through further technological innovations. But these innovations, too, will inevitably produce ripple effects in social structure and social expectations perhaps every bit as serious as the previous innovations had. The only way we can fully eliminate the deleterious effects of our technology is to rid ourselves of it, but then we would have to forswear its advantages as well. The recognition that there is no such thing as a “free lunch” in cultural development—or even in the critique of cultural development—is the essence of the ambivalent conception.

Foucault’s concept of cultural proliferation is a one-sided vision of the process of cultural articulation introduced in Chapter 2. There I argued that one of the most important features of culture, and of cultural software in particular, is that it allows us to articulate our values. Because this process is one of bricolage, its adequacies and deficiencies are linked. Thus I argued that an ambivalent conception of cultural development flows from a proper recognition of the process of cultural articulation.

Foucault’s concept of proliferation views the process of cultural articulation through the distorting lens of a pejorative conception of ideology. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault offers an account of the cultural articulation of human values through technology, institutions, and cultural software. What he calls the “deployment of sexuality” is actually a broader phenomenon. It is the cultural articulation of sexual desire, as well as of the various virtues that grow out of this desire or in opposition to it. These include, among other things, our values of love, self-control, propriety, and beauty. Through culture, individuals come to recognize and understand their sexual desires, and they develop conceptions of virtuous behavior with respect to these desires.<sup>29</sup>

In *The Uses of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, Foucault changes his focus from the proliferation of sexuality to the problematization of sexuality. By “problematization” Foucault means the process of a subject’s understanding what constitutes problems or difficulties and why they are considered to be a subject of concern. Foucault’s shift of terminology in these last two books mirrors his new emphasis on the subject and the subject’s point of view. In fact, problematization, like proliferation, is just another perspective on cultural articulation. It is cultural articulation understood from the perspective of the individual subject. In *The Uses of Pleasure*, for example, Foucault focuses on the

importance in the ancient world of the concept of *sōphrosynē*, or self-mastery. The problematization of *sōphrosynē* is the flip side of the cultural proliferation of sexual desire. Because sex is constructed and understood in a certain way, the issue of self-control becomes an important value, and vice versa. Moreover, like proliferation, problematization is simply a perspective on the process of cultural articulation of values. Problematization means discovering what is important to us and why it is important. Thus it is a form of cultural articulation of human values.

Foucault's twin concepts of proliferation and problematization are incomplete because they do not recognize that through the articulation of human values, human beings can achieve freedom as well as enslavement. The concept of *sōphrosynē* provides an example. Through the exercise of self-mastery, the ancients believed, an individual achieved a degree of freedom. Viewed from the standpoint of Foucault's theories, the discourse of self-mastery is just another variety of subjection to bio-power, just like the discourses of sexual liberation in the twentieth century. Indeed, the ancients' conception of self-mastery is a particularly heinous form of enslavement because it is not even recognized as such; instead, it is disguised as a form of freedom.

Yet the ancients were not wholly deluded. Self-control and self-mastery, even though culturally created—and indeed, precisely because they are culturally created—are forms of autonomy. To be able to control oneself—for example, to be able to interact with others without unbridled passion or violence—is a kind of freedom. Similarly, to have knowledge and skill—even if these arise only through cultural practices, and disciplines—is a kind of empowerment.

In his *Conjectural Beginning of Human History*, Kant uses the story of the expulsion from Eden to make a similar point. For Kant, the fig leaf that Adam and Eve don is the symbol of humanity's entry into culture. Foucault might say that wearing clothes for the sake of modesty marks a beginning of the proliferation of the discourse of sexuality, or the human problematization of sexuality. But Kant sees something more. The fig leaf, he argues, "reflects consciousness of a certain degree of mastery of reason over impulse." In this event, Kant argues, we see "a first hint at the development of man as a moral creature." Finally, Kant notes, the entry into culture marks not only the beginnings of moral rationality but also the beginning of the cultural articulation of values. Through the act of modesty, Kant argues, humanity moves from the experience of sensuous pleasure to an appreciation of the beautiful.<sup>30</sup>

Thus what Foucault might see as the beginnings of human enslavement to disciplinary practice, Kant sees as the beginnings of the articulation of our values, and the beginnings of the development of our culturally created reason. Moreover, Kant argues, as human beings attain the capacity to reason, they

attain the capacity to be free. Thus both morality and freedom are made possible by the process of cultural articulation.

The most satisfactory approach to the philosophy of culture would temper Kant's optimism with Foucault's pessimism. It would recognize that both thinkers describe the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Through cultural proliferation, human beings acquire new skills, new abilities, and new forms of knowledge; yet in the process they make themselves subject to ever new forms of hermeneutic power. Culture, in short, is a predicament, and the theory of ideology stands as a particularly apt symbol of this predicament. The study of ideology is the study of the deficiencies of our thought, but it is made possible only because our thought has already provided the means to think them. It is the study of the powers exercised over our understanding, but it is accessible only because our understanding has already created the power to understand them. It is the study of the limitations of our imagination, but it is conceivable only because our imagination has already bestowed upon us the freedom to imagine them.



28. For a survey of the literature and the relevant debates, see Medin, “Concepts and Category Formation.” A different account is offered in Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*.

29. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 85.

30. Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Probability, Representativeness, and the Conjunction Fallacy,” *Psychological Review* 90 (1983): 293–315.

31. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 85–86.

32. *Ibid.*, 80–84.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Cf. *ibid.*, 81.

35. *Ibid.*

## 12. The Power of Understanding

1. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings, 1972–1977*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 118.

2. *Ibid.*

3. See, e.g., Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 170.

4. Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 118.

5. See Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 131.

6. Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Couzens Hoy, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 69–102. Ironically, although the goal of genealogy is to deny that a deeper hidden meaning lurks beneath the surface of social events, this truth itself must be revealed through a process of unmasking the fraud of deep meaning. The deeper meaning of social life is that there is no deeper meaning. Dreyfus and Rabinow demonstrate this paradox in their very formulation of Foucault’s project: “The genealogist recognizes that the deep hidden meanings, the unreachable heights of truth, the murky interiors of consciousness are all shams . . . Genealogy’s . . . banner [is]: Mistrust identities in history: they are only masks.” Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2d ed., 1983), 107. Yet mistrust implies a truer state of affairs that lies behind what is mistrusted.

7. See Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, and Socialism*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: New Left, 1978), 149.

8. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 95–96.

9. *Ibid.*, 94.

10. Thomas Seung has suggested to me that Foucault’s theory of resistance is Hegelian, because the antithesis (resistance) grows magically out of the thesis (the system of power).

11. See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 82–83.

12. *Ibid.*, 81.

13. See, e.g., Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1: 95.

14. See Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 148–51.

15. See, e.g., Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 147–48; *Discipline and Punish*, 25–30.

16. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1: 94.

17. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 6–7.

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

19. *Ibid.*, 6.

20. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 142.

21. Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Rhetoric and Change in Law and Literary Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 520 (italics omitted).

22. See Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth.”

23. See Stephen Jay Gould, *Hen’s Teeth and Horse’s Toes* (New York: Norton, 1983), 158–65.

24. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 238–40.

25. Stanley Fish, *There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech (and It’s a Good Thing Too)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 117.

26. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1: 94–95.

27. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 266–67, 324–25.

28. See Michel Foucault, “An Aesthetics of Existence,” in *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966–84* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 313.

29. Like all articulation, this process involves construction as well as refinement; thus Foucault is partly correct that articulation does not involve the rediscovery of a deeper sexual nature that was always present. That is because sexual desire, like all human desires and values, is inchoate and indeterminate. It must be articulated through the development of culture. Although sexual desire is articulated through culture, sexual desire is not wholly a creation of culture; even before culture existed, human beings had sexual desires. Foucault is ambiguous on this point. He doubts that “sex is an anchorage point that supports the manifestations of sexuality”; rather, he thinks it is “a complex idea that was formed inside the deployment of sexuality.” Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1: 152. Sex is a concept that we use to describe the ways in which we have understood our bodies through culture. Thus, Foucault insists, “sex is not an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power.” Instead, “sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures” (155).

The difficulty with this formulation lies in the last phrase. How can power have a grip on the “energies, sensations, and pleasures” of bodies if bodies have energies, sensations, and pleasures only as a result of culture? Here Foucault’s Parmenideanism reasserts itself: sex must always have been internal to sexuality; everything must already be



fully contained within the system of cultural power. Yet without human values to be shaped through culture, cultural articulation cannot even get off the ground.

30. Immanuel Kant, “Conjectural Beginning of Human History,” in *Kant on History*, Lewis White Beck, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 57.

### 13. Knowledge Made Flesh

1. Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).