88

TRUTH

In his final works, Foucault explains his overall project as a "history of truth" centered on the relations between subjectivity and truth. Whereas the early archaeology focuses primarily on the formation of new objects and discourses of knowledge, and later, genealogy focuses on techniques of power and self-formation, the problematic of truth is the overriding framework through which Foucault develops these analyses. Throughout all of his work, in fact, Foucault's question is how discourse, institutions, politics, and subjects are established within regimes of truth.

To emerge as a knowable object in reality is also always to enter into a regime of truth, according to Foucault. A regime (or game) should be understood as a set of rules and constraints divided between true and false discourses and practices (EEW1, 297). With this notion, Foucault displaces the traditional correspondence theory of truth, which holds that our knowledge must correspond with or reflect pregiven objects in reality. In order to correspond with these objects, a certain form of subjectivity is required that would be able to access the truth of these objects and hold onto this truth over time. In the history of philosophy, this subject usually takes on a set of universal and ahistorical characteristics that are necessary to have access to such knowledge. When the subject possesses these characteristics naturally and without any necessary history or practice, Foucault calls this kind of subject one that possesses truth through *self-evidence*.

Foucault's philosophy of truth resists the notion that there is either an a priori constituted subject or a pregiven object and instead examines the historical constitution of the subject, the object, and their interrelation. If truth, in Foucault's thought, is involved with correspondence, it can only be one that is historically produced (Gros 2004, 11–12). His entire philosophical career involves a critique of the notion of *self-evidence* and the subject and object that would naturally correspond in such a relation. In his philosophy of truth, it can be seen that each period of his thought involves a critique of self-evidence from a different vantage point, whether it be the

517

history of scientific discourse, the immanence of power and knowledge, or the subject's relation to itself.

Through the critique of self-evidence, Foucault situates the problem of truth at the historical level, excavating the historical conditions of possibility of a given regime of truth. This is the aim in combining key insights of the Kantian analytic with history, in what Foucault calls the *historical a priori*. Instead of asking what it is that makes possible a universal subject capable of knowledge in general, it asks what embeds a subject within a particular regime of truth, what practices are required, what discourses are accepted, and what cost is paid for the subject to enter into that reality. At the same time, the question is one of the conditions behind an object becoming a positive figure of knowledge. What procedures, what order of space, visibility, and time, what institutions, and what relations of power were required for an object such as madness, perversion, delinquency, or the anthropological ideas of the human being to emerge as knowable objects? For Foucault, a regime of truth is the nexus between the historical conditions of possibility of the subject and the historical conditions of possibility of the object. It is the site where truth names the constraints and modalities required of both subject and object to enter the positivity of reality and engage in a set of possible relations (EEW2, 459–460; EEW3, 242–254).

Reflections on truth at the level of history generally tend toward the view that truth is without history entirely, or that its history can only be one of progressive unfolding and clarification. The latter, teleological view claims that through time we are finally able to grasp the great truths of labor, life, language, psychology, sexuality, human rights, liberal government, and so on. These were truths that always existed outside of history, but to discover them it required the test of time and the trial and error of finite human practice: slowly through history, the infinite unshakeable truth reveals itself in the finite.

Instead of a universal theory of truth modified by the modalities of teleological, revealing, or obscuring history, Foucault thinks of a topology of truth in its history and geography. Truth is linked to history in the modality of the event, which requires an examination of its conditions of emergence and its geography of instantiation. Truth is produced within a certain set of circumstances and produces a certain set of behaviors and constraints. The truth-event opposes the notion of self-evident demonstrative truth that can be found in any place or any time regardless of the circumstances. In short, Foucault would like to study a "truth which does not belong to the order of what is, but to the order of what happens, a truth, therefore, which is not given in the form of discovery, but in the form of the event, a truth which is not found but aroused and hunted down: production rather than apophantic" (ECF-PP, 237).

In his archaeological texts from *History of Madness* through *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault develops a methodological principle: the rejection of the universal from the start in order to examine the *event* of knowledge and its rules of construction. Traditionally, the history of science has taken the "universality" of a

scientific discovery and used it as a filter to examine the history of errors and mistakes leading up to this truth. The truth then allows us to separate it from all of the errors and ideologies that led up to its discovery (Gros 2004, 13). In short, the purity of the scientific lineage leading up to this truth is extracted from its accidental and erroneous history.

Foucault's archaeological method is the inverse of this. Instead of starting with the universal, he starts with a particular discourse and excavates the archaeological conditions that made such a discourse possible. As he would later explain in a lecture at the Collège de France:

> [I]nstead of deducing concrete phenomena from universals, or instead of starting with universals as an obligatory grid of intelligibility for certain concrete practices, I would like to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these universals through the grid of these practices.… It was the same question in the case of madness.… If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can history make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness? (ECF-BIO, 3; see also EAK, 207)

Madness should be supposed not to exist, in the sense that it does not have any ahistorical or universal reality that we can use to interpret its particular historical variations. Instead, the key to understanding the truth regime of madness is found in the rules and practices by which madness was produced as an object to be known and controlled, along with the forms of subjectivity that it produced and constrained. So, the truth of madness is not to be discovered internal to some true or false definition of "madness in itself" but is instead the very reality produced by a game of truth. Truth does not correspond to some pregiven object, as in the classical correspondence theory of truth, but instead truth is itself productive of and produced by reality.

It should be noted here that Foucault is not interested in any and all games of truth or a critique of science as such. His interest, instead, is in those discourses and games that involve the truth of the human subject, or how "the subject himself becomes an object of possible knowledge" (EEW2, 460). Namely, the task is to see how a possible "science of the human" developed and how a truth game was crystallized around the human. As Frédéric Gros writes, "man is fundamentally thought in [Foucault's] work as *an animal of truth*" (Gros 2004, 11, Gros's italics). All of Foucault's analyses aim to excavate the processes through which man has become both an object and a subject of truth: from the human sciences to the incitement of discourse where the subject seeks to constantly produce and discover an inner truth through confession and self-examination (see EHS1).

The analysis of madness can then be situated as the initiation of Foucault's studies of man's enmeshment within a game of truth. *History of Madness* examines how

the Renaissance understanding of madness as a force inhabiting the entire cosmos was transformed into a psychological truth of the human being. How was the seat of the truth of madness shifted from the fabric of the cosmos to an exclusive location within the human being? Furthermore, how did the truth of madness as the irrational exterior to human reason serve to found the truth interior to modern reason?

Foucault shows that the division between madness and reason is not established on some pure rational decision. It is not a positivistic universal that can retrospectively be separated from its accidental history. Instead, the modern truth regime of madness is rooted in a political and economic history of division: the great confinement of the mad and the poor across Europe in the seventeenth century. This position of exclusion was a fundamental condition of possibility for the division between madness and reason and for the emergence of mental illness as a scientific discourse and object of study. In the great confinement, the mad had not been separated from indolence and other forms of social deviance. Yet, it was in this space of confinement where the first doctors of mental illness began to articulate a scientific discourse based on the emergent order of visibility and sayability. However, even the scientific basis on which these doctors could make their statements about mental illness was lacking. This construction was instead based on a complicated subjection of the mad through new structures of recognition and reflexivity. The famous liberation of the mad from their chains in France was coupled with the development of a whole new structure of subjection whereby the mad were led to recognize and internalize their own illness: physical chains substituted for psychical ones. Further, this was a discourse rooted in a figure of authority, the medical person, which did not yet have a scientific basis for understanding madness.

In this sense, the scientific status of the truth of madness as mental illness is shown to have its archaeological roots in a game of division and exclusion that is not evidenced on the surface of its discourse. The *self-evidence* of the mad subject as a natural scientific object to be studied is thrown into question, and the event of madness in its formation of rules and divisions is shown to be the proper site of investigation of its truth regime. The self-evidence of knowledge would set up a direct correspondence wherein the subject is not transformed or constrained in order to come into relation with the truth. Instead Foucault studies the processes through which this relation between subject and object is made possible: at what price and with what history does an object emerge as something that can be known? What effects of constraint, obedience, and subjection must subjects pass through in order to be knowable as objects of truth?

Foucault's aim is not, however, to claim that the scientific discourse of mental illness is in itself *true* or *false* or even ideological. Mental illness possesses its own truth regime and a reality that is not at all illusory. The task is not to propose its falsification by referencing some greater truth but instead to expose its conditions of construction, thus demonstrating that truth never rests purely on its own

foundations but is always bound to a relation of otherness in its ties to a long institutional and political history. As Foucault claims in his final unpronounced notes to his final lecture at the Collège de France, "truth is never the same" (ECF-COT, 340).

Foucault's archaeological examination of scientific discourse initiated a number of critiques against the Marxist theory of truth, critiques that were further developed in his genealogy of power. In fact, Foucault claims that the prominent power-knowledge dyad of this period was intended as a displacement of Marxist ideology theory (FCF-GDV, 74–78). Generally speaking, ideology theory supposes that a critique of a given discourse as false or ideological will allow one to attain a deeper underlying truth: smashing the veneer of ideology opens up the path of the real and the true. For Foucault, there is no deeper layer of reality that can be found underneath the surface and there is no deeper truth that he claims to reveal underneath the divisions and constraints of a truth regime.

Ideology theory claims, furthermore, that false appearances are due strictly to the machinations of power and that the brilliance of truth could tear down this facade. This schema is evidenced in the great battling cry of political analysis and activism: "We must speak truth to power." This cry is quite familiar to the history of the West, such that Foucault situates its emergence with the Greeks, all the way back to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Plato's political philosophy (EEW3, 30–32). This cry supposes that if we were able to penetrate the iron gates of power with all of the brilliant and incriminating truths it has been hiding, then power would simply collapse and lose the legitimate grounds for its justification. In short, it is supposed that truth and power are external to one another and that power can only legitimate itself through an illusory or deceptive relation to the truth. Foucault's intervention into political analysis is to show that we should no longer consider truth and power in relations of externality but instead consider them in a field of immanence. Every form of power is supported by a network of truth relations, and every regime of truth carries with it effects of power (EEW3, 132–133). Just as he refused it in the study of madness, Foucault will refuse the claim that a truth regime is false or ideological because it is produced by and produces relations of power. Instead, he will aim to show that truth is itself immanent to power and produces power relations.

Truth, then, is not a strictly epistemological problem where the purity of knowledge is opposed to the effects of coercion produced on the subject through power. Instead, truth involves relations of force that compel certain conducts and produce forms of subjectivity. As Foucault explained in an interview, "My problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth (… not the production of true utterances but the establishment of domains in which the practice of true and false can be made at once ordered and pertinent)" (EEW3, 230). This definition of his problem, which could apply to his entire corpus, points to the way in which the direction of human conduct is always compelled by a discourse or ordering

of the true and the false. Political power is unintelligible without the deployment of truth as a matrix through which subjects govern themselves and others.

In moving away from epistemological models to a study of political regimes of truth, Foucault will study the role of truth in relation to the history of juridical forms. The relationship between what he will call veridiction (the establishment of veridical domains or truth regimes) and juridical forms or jurisdiction is present in most of his studies during the 1970s. These analyses show the points at which political technologies move between a foundation and legitimation rooted primarily in juridical forms to one rooted primarily in a regime of truth. Generally speaking, this is the framework of analysis for *Discipline and Punish*. In this work, Foucault provides a genealogy of the process through which the juridical question of "what did you do?" is displaced by a question of truth about the subject: "who are you?" (EDP, 17–19). The whole apparatus of disciplinary power is predicated on this new technology of truth that seeks to find the truth of the individual, rather than one that seeks to establish whether a certain infraction was broken, requiring a codified punishment. Modern governmental power is thus primarily supported by veridiction, the division between the true and the false, and only secondarily tied to jurisdiction, the division between the permissible and the nonpermissible.

In a series of lectures from 1973 in Rio de Janeiro, "Truth and Juridical Forms," Foucault traces out an even longer history of this relation between truth and jurisdiction, leading from the Homeric era, through the tragedy of Oedipus and the medieval practices of inquiry, up to the practices of examination and panopticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (EEW3, 1–89). What these histories show is the increasing instantiation and prioritization of procedures of truth over jurisdiction in the field of politics. Stated otherwise, there were always procedures of truth embedded within jurisdiction, but increasingly truth became a principle of verification, rationalization, and individualization, exerting a much greater force than jurisdiction itself.

Modern veridical forms have increasingly moved away from truth-events and rituals (such as the Homeric trial by test or combat) toward a reign of demonstrative truth where there is a totalizing grid of all possible subjects to be known and controlled. The Panopticon is one such example of a totalizing *tableau vivant* where all subjects can be placed and known at all times. In this case, we see how demonstrative truth is not tied to a purely scientific history but a political history that set up the conditions for subjects to be observable, controllable, and visible at all times and all places.

In Foucault's final works on the technologies of subjectivity, the problematic of the government of human beings (self and others) by truth is developed to focus more extensively on the government of self by truth. If his earlier studies examined the government of others by truth in more depth, his later work will show the network that flows between self and other, and between politics and ethics. These late

studies do not come at the expense of the studies on power but instead deepen the analysis of the government of human beings by truth. A theory of power in itself was never his aim, explains Foucault, but rather a study of techniques of subjection and reflexivity: "I am working on the history, at a given moment, of the way reflexivity of self upon self was established, and the discourse of truth linked to it" (EEW2, 452).

The analysis of technologies of subjectivity, furthermore, deepens the critique of self-evidence and the demonstrative reign of truth. Here, Foucault examines the different rituals and procedures through which subjects recognize or speak truths of themselves. With each of these late studies, he accounts for a different set of practices that are required of the subject to encounter or speak a truth, and none of them begin with the idea of a natural subject with immediate access to the true (EEW1, 290). Since Descartes, philosophy has searched for a direct and natural relationship between the subject who knows and the object it knows. In what Foucault cautiously terms the "Cartesian moment," the subject takes on a form of self-evidence where there is a direct interior link between the *I think* and its access to a clear and distinct truth (ECF-HOS, 14). This Cartesian moment founds a relationship between subjectivity and truth that is free from ritual, practice, *askesis*, and self-transformation. It is a form of subjectivity freed from what Foucault calls "spirituality," or the set of necessary transformations required of the subject to access the truth (ECF-HOS, 15–16). Foucault's interest in the practices of self in antiquity addresses a variety of different modes of spirituality; that is, the modes of how the subject is formed in relation to an event of truth.

Foucault assigns a term for this relationship between subjectivity and the event of truth in his 1979–1980 course at the Collège de France, "Du Gouvernement des Vivants": *alethurgy* or *alethurgical forms* (FCF-GDV, 8–9). Alethurgy combines the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, with the verb for work or production, *ergon*. Thus, etymologically speaking, *alethurgy* refers to the production of the truth. Foucault certainly has a critique of Heidegger in mind here by proposing a reformulation of the Greek term to emphasize the *production* of truth rather than its *unveiling* or *disclosure*. For Foucault, truth has no underlying substratum to be unveiled or disclosed. Instead, alethurgical forms will consider the production of truth through rituals and practices where the subject manifests, recognizes, speaks, or forms an obligation to truth. Whereas archaeology investigated the historical event through which a broader regime of truth came into place at the level of scientific discourse, alethurgy will focus more directly on the event of truth as it occurs through the practices and rituals carried out by and through the subject. What are the rituals and procedures through which a truth gains its force at the level of the subject? What effects of transformation does truth have on the subject, and how have we established such a devotion to truth in the history of the West?

Here it might be asked, and Foucault poses this question himself: why continue using the notion of truth for these practices and rituals? The archaeological studies

emphasized the process through which the human became an object of scientific discourses of truth. Yet, Foucault wants to show that truth had a different history and a different set of rules prior to the modern scientific understanding of truth as objective and demonstrative. Truth has not always presented itself as an ahistorical and unconditioned object (see also Detienne 1999). These studies in antiquity aim to restore the modality of the event to the advent of truth. In a late interview, Foucault clarified this emphasis on truth:

> After all, why truth? How did it come about that all of Western culture began to revolve around this obligation of truth which has taken a lot of different forms? Things being as they are, nothing so far has shown that it is possible to define a strategy outside of this concern. It is within the field of the obligation to truth that it is possible to move about in one way or another, sometimes against the effects of domination which may be linked to structures of truth or institutions entrusted with truth…. Thus, one escaped from a domination of truth not by playing a game that was totally different from the game of truth but by playing the same game differently, or playing another game, another, with other trump cards. (EEW1, 295)

There is no pure outside to the truth game but only a different set of rules and a different set of possible cards. Foucault's studies of the ancient world do not then seek to escape games of truth but to examine a different set of rules and cards by which these games were played. In order to do this, they analyze games of truth that are specifically tied to the character of the event: in terms of rituals, practices, forms of speech, and *askesis*.

In this movement to examine a whole different set of truth games free from the demonstrative reign of self-evidence, Foucault will show the different forms in which truth was not primarily predicated on an epistemological but rather an ethical (or political) relation in antiquity. For example, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, he shows that modern philosophy has entirely overlooked the fundamental link between the care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*) and truth in antiquity. The maxim at Delphi, know thyself (*gnōthi seauton*), has almost completely overshadowed this other history. Foucault shows the Hellenistic practices through which self-care was always required of the subject in order to have access to truth, and where self-knowledge only had meaning with respect to a preliminary care of the self. A reexamination of the figure of Socrates in *The Apology* illuminates the centrality of this theme of self-care. Here, Socrates is fundamentally a character who urges others to take care of themselves, and it is only through such care that they might eventually attain the path to wisdom. This theme is clearly present in all of Stoic philosophy as well, and Foucault shows that it was, in fact, a fundamental concern of all of antiquity.

In *The Courage of Truth*, Foucault extends his studies of *parrēsia* (frank speech or fearless truth-telling) from the previous year's course, "The Government of Self and Others," and shows the way in which the true discourse of a subject is bound not to a condition of knowledge but an ethical and political condition. For example, in Plato's *Laches*, Socrates' ability to speak the truth is predicated not on a correspondence with his knowledge but on an ethical relation of mastery he has achieved in his deeds. Thus, it is through the harmony between words and deeds that Socrates has access to the true and frank discourse of *parrēsia*. The Cynics radicalize this harmony and ask the question: what is the form of life such that we can make the brilliance of the truth appear in the very form of our existence? The Cynics arrive at a point where *parrēsia* becomes a confrontational form of life over and above a confrontational form of speech. Thus, we see that the *alethurgical* appearance of truth is already produced in the mode of existence itself, in the *bios*, which does not necessarily await the articulation of the *logos* to become visible: "In short, Cynicism makes life, existence, *bios*, what could be called an alethurgy, a manifestation of truth" (ECF-COT, 172). Arriving at the end of Foucault's philosophical career, we are quite far from the reign of self-evidence. Instead truth is manifested in the scandalous practice of Cynic critique, one that brilliantly appears through *bios* rather than *logos* with the force of an event.

In concluding, it is worth considering two critiques often posed to Foucault's philosophy of truth. The first is the claim that Foucault is nothing more than a radical relativist and so must not be able to tell us very much about truth. This claim fails to grasp the nature of a regime of truth that is precisely not just any set of rules or rituals but ones that have been historically instantiated to have determinate effects on the very being of the subject. The radical relativist would have no interest in games of truth, because the radical relativist thinks that there are no rules of constraint and that any and all acts may pass as true depending on the beliefs or opinions of the individual. This position could not be further from Foucault's view that we must understand the specific constraints that lead us to formulate and carry out truths on ourselves, whether it be in scientific studies that objectify the subject, practices of power that conduct the subject, or in the ethical relations that the subject holds to itself. Truth is always embedded within a network of constraints and possible actions.

The second critique leveled against Foucault asks about the truth content of his own utterances that he produces in his books, essays, and interviews. In response to this question, Foucault claims that his books should be read as experiences and not as factual claims to be verified as true or false (EEW3, 239–246). Foucault's aim in writing philosophy is not to expose us to some deeper truth, for this would return his work to the very ideology theory that his work aims to displace. Instead, these experience books aim at the immanent critique of the intolerable effects of power and subjection that certain discourses of truth hold for the subject. The aim is not

to break free from the regime of truth as such but to locate the points of resistance where the rules of the games might be constructed otherwise. These points of resistance are most often located in those places where Foucault sees the possibility of restoring the status of truth as event over and against a demonstrative truth that appears self-evident.

This philosophy of truth is certainly not one that seeks to provide a theory of truth as such. It is instead a critical history of different truth regimes, with the aim being not to show that any particular regime is true or false but to demonstrate the rules of construction and the effects and constraints that these regimes have on the subject. In our own time, these constraints have increasingly become ossified around the self-evident and necessary notion of truth as demonstration (see also Lorenzini 2010). Foucault's histories aim to shatter the self-evidence of demonstrative truth by showing that truth is itself an event with its own conditions, history, and spatiotemporal foundations.

Demonstrative truth is true regardless of its place or time; dwelling everywhere, it can be known by anyone at any time. It is a truth waiting to be discovered and one that is progressively clarified and grasped through history. The truth-event is by contrast like a lightning bolt that transforms those who come into contact with it. It is a truth belonging to the order of force and not to the order of knowledge. This truth is a

> dispersed, discontinuous, interrupted truth which will only speak or appear from time to time, where it wishes to, in certain places; a truth which does not appear everywhere, at all times, or for everyone; a truth which is not waiting for us, because it is a truth which has its favourable moments, its propitious places, its privileged agents and bearers. It is a truth which has its geography. (ECF-PP, 236)

In this sense, all of Foucault's studies aim at studying truth as an event to show the conditions of space, time, the distribution of bodies, knowledge, and power that enable a particular truth to emerge and gain force at a particular time and place. If Foucault's own discourse is allied to a truth claim, it is to the character of truth as an event. It is a discourse that works to produce this effect of transformation on the level of force and not strictly on the epistemological level of what is to be known. Perhaps, then, a different experience of truth in its force as an event could open the points of contingency where this "animal of truth" might shatter the dominion of demonstration with the brilliance of a lightning bolt.

Don T. Deere

SEE ALSO

Historical a Priori
Knowledge
Parrēsia
Power
Self
Spirituality
Martin Heidegger

SUGGESTED READING

Detienne, Marcel. 1999. *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books.

Flynn, Thomas R. 1985. "Truth and Subjectivation in the Later Foucault," *Journal of Philosophy* 82, no. 10:531–540.

Gros, Frédéric. 2004. "Michel Foucault, Une Philosophie de la Vérité," in *Michel Foucault: Philosophie Anthologie*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson and Frédéric Gros. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, pp. 11–25.

Lorenzini, Daniele. 2008. "'El Cinismo Hace de la Vida Una *Aleturgie*.' Apuntes Para Una Relectura del Recorrido Filosófico del Último Michel Foucault," *Revista Laguna* 23:63–90.

    2010. "Para Acabar con la Verdad-Demostración. Bachelard, Canguilhem, Foucault y La Historia de los 'Regímenes de Verdad,'" *Revista Laguna* 26:9–34.

Prado, C. G. 2006. *Foucault and Searle on Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 3.

Revel, Judith. 2009. "Vérité/Jeux de Vérité," in *Le Vocabulaire de Foucault*. Paris: Éditions Ellipses, pp. 64–65.