

Theseus vs. the Minotaur: Finding the Common Thread in the Chomsky-Foucault Debate

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We commonly think of a debate as a means of expressing one's position to another, while simultaneously respecting and recognizing the right of the other to do the same. But the true importance of a debate is not so much in expression but in arriving at the 'truth'. That is to say, the true importance of debate in Western history, thought, and institutions, is that by discussing, evaluating, and critiquing issues, beliefs and arguments, we arrive at a better understanding as to their validity and soundness. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, this concern for publicly debating issues that are very close to our homes and hearts seems to be the very hallmark of rationality, democracy, and social justice. By establishing an open-minded arena where we seek to understand and argue truthfully about important matters at hand, we do so objectively with the purpose of including as many participants as possible.

According to some, however, this concern is close to extinction. With political leaders signing important economic and political documents behind closed, barricaded hotel doors, many political and social activists feel that our 'representatives of the people's will' have likewise closed the doors on discourse and democracy - they have, in other words, shut the door on debate. Now, one might claim that although this may be depressing it is certainly nothing new. But perhaps what is most disturbing is that even those who claim to be fighting for rational, open debate, concerning important political, social and economic issues, seem to be irrational, close minded, and even disrespectful towards others expressing viewpoints that contradict their own. How can social activists claim to argue for open, rational, public debate with those who hold power, when they are unwilling to listen to conflicting interpretations and perspectives even within their own 'ranks'? How, that is, can we expect those in power to argue truthfully, without defending their vested interests in the outcome of a debate, when those who claim to be the defend-

ers of 'true discourse' and 'undistorted forms of communication' use propaganda against one another? Indeed, why do some intellectuals not only completely fail to understand another's position but regard another as an enemy to the 'truth' and 'real' moral progress, even when both claim they are fighting for social justice? In short, how can we rekindle the desire to speak truthfully amongst the many competing theories and ideologies that constitute contemporary 'Leftism'?

In the following article, I will focus on the above questions by examining, in some detail, the breakdown of communication and discourse in the famous Chomsky-Foucault debate (1971). I shall demonstrate that the debate was an enormously important event for two reasons. First, the debate represents a forum for the exchange of two diametrically opposed positions. Chomsky, the linguist libertarian, argues for a political structure founded upon a biological theory of how humans actually are, regardless of historical and environmental conditioning. Foucault, on the other hand, stresses that such a position is both morally and politically dangerous because biology and linguistics are historical, discursive constructions tied to power. Second and perhaps more importantly, both Chomsky and Foucault are political activists attempting 'to tear down the same mountain' and yet neither participant embraces, fully understands, nor even *attempts to try* to understand the position of the other.¹ This is perhaps the most perplexing issue and the one most difficult to solve since surely those committed to telling the truth and exposing injustices must be able to communicate and attempt to understand the thoughts and concerns of their fellow compatriots. I do not purport to provide any concrete solutions but what I shall demonstrate is that truly open debate requires not just a commitment to speaking the 'truth' but indeed a hyper-commitment as it were. To state this point another way, we must debate with the other as if he or she is speaking the truth even though we think he or she is lying.

In 1971, a television debate, of sorts, took place between these two philosophers and social activists in the Netherlands. Fons Elders, the moderator of the debate, described the two philosophers as 'both tunnellers through a mountain, working at opposite sides of the same mountain with different tools, without even knowing if they are working in each other's direction.'² However, such a description appears grossly inaccurate as the debate continues and is inconsistent with how the participants saw one another. In 1990, Chomsky confided to James Miller, Foucault's biographer, the following sen-

timents concerning the debate:

I'd never met anyone who was so totally amoral... Usually when you talk to someone, you take for granted that you share some moral territory. Usually what you find is self-justification in terms of shared moral criteria; in that case, you can have an argument, you can pursue it, you can find out what's right and what's wrong about the position. With him, though, I felt like I was talking to someone who didn't inhabit the same moral universe. I mean, I liked him personally. It's just that I couldn't make sense of him. It's as if he was from a different species or something.³

Such a remark is both confusing and rather telling. It is confusing because those who are at least somewhat familiar with Foucault and his work, are aware that his writings and actions were *always* centred around political resistance albeit in a variety of different forms. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Foucault was very active, taking part in many political protests in France.⁴ Further, Foucault's writings, since *Madness and Civilization*, have attempted to address important moral topics such as the ethical treatment of the insane.⁵

But perhaps what is most strange about Chomsky's remark is that even in this debate Foucault indicates his moral concerns in a number of different exchanges. For example, when asked by the debate moderator Elders, if he believed that western societies and governments of the time were democratic, Foucault had this to say:

If one understands by democracy the effective exercise of power by the population which is neither divided or hierarchically ordered in classes, it is quite clear that we are very far from democracy. It is only too clear that we are living under a regime of a dictatorship of class, of a power of class which imposes itself by violence, even when the instruments of this violence are institutional and constitutional; and to that degree, there isn't any question of democracy for us.⁶

Now, clearly such a response concerns a political and moral dilemma. If Foucault were amoral, which is usually defined as signifying 'the absence, in a person, of any understanding of, or concern for, moral standards and decencies',⁷ then we would expect Foucault to be rather indifferent to this problem. If Foucault were amoral, we would expect him to remain neutral on this subject. But this simply is not the case. Foucault seeks to remedy our political sit-

uation by stressing not only what *ought* to be done but, indeed, what he feels *must* be done, in order to reverse this moral and political travesty:

One of the tasks that seems *immediate* and *urgent* to me, over and above anything else, is this: that we should indicate and show up, even where they are hidden, all the relationships of political power which actually control the social body and *oppress* or *repress* it.⁸ (Emphasis added)

To argue, as Foucault does in this passage, and in several others in the debate,⁹ that the task is to expose the relationships, patterns and grids of political power that oppress or repress us, is undoubtedly anything but an amoral position.

Moreover, and perhaps stranger still, some of Chomsky's advocates¹⁰ are also guilty of this 'false labelling' and complete misunderstanding of Foucault's intentions, even with the advantage of hindsight. James McGilvray, for example, writes in *Chomsky, Language, Mind and Politics*: 'One of the most interesting of Chomsky's encounters with a moral relativist is that with Foucault in 1971.'¹¹ McGilvray goes further and explains that:

Where Chomsky sees moral progress, the relativist claims to see only changes in 'moral' evaluation. Where he sees some satisfactions as satisfactions of fundamental needs and others as pathological perversions, the relativist would claim to see undistinguishable pleasures. Where he sees evidence of a fixed human nature with a moral component, the relativist sees the drifts and currents of historical change.¹²

Thus, according to McGilvray's understanding of social justice, and following, as he says, the 'vision' of Chomsky, resistance to political oppression only makes sense if one is fighting in the name of a higher ideal - in the name, that is, of a higher type of justice. So, although we may disagree with McGilvray's interpretation of Foucault, nonetheless, he has managed, albeit only implicitly, to get to the heart of the matter in this debate. How can we come to understand and appreciate another's philosophical position that is, as Elders says, 'working on the other side of the mountain' and yet very different from our own approach?

Chomsky's point, as indicated by McGilvray, is well taken - if one is not fighting for moral progress and for true social justice then there seems to be no

point in fighting at all. Surely protest, and resistance in general, is only worthwhile if there is at least some hope that a better, fairer and more just society will come of it. While, to be sure, Chomsky is not naïve enough to believe that an anarcho-syndicalist political and economic order, based upon small communities of mutual co-operation, is an utopia, nevertheless, the case could be made that it is a much better form of society than our present model. For it would allow us to be, as Chomsky says, fully *human*. It would allow, to quote Chomsky, 'those basic, decent, human instincts to develop and flourish.'¹³

For Chomsky, there are two such basic human instincts. The first instinct is that of freedom while the second is that of solidarity. And from Chomsky's point of view, an anarcho-syndicalist society would allow for both of these needs to be met. Such a society would allow for spontaneous initiative and creative work to thrive. That is, one would actually enjoy work for its own sake instead of approaching it with a sense of dread and being viewed by others, and by oneself, as a mere cog in the machine. Secondly, a true sense of friendship, and solidarity, could also be realized. The organization of such a society would be founded upon a collection of already natural existing communities that, by and large, would be self-governed and enter into mutual pacts of co-operation when necessary.¹⁴ So, for Chomsky, the ultimate justification for, and foundation of, resistance to our current political system is that it represses our fundamental human needs. In short, our current political and economic system does not allow for these fundamental needs to develop and flourish and therefore, according to Chomsky, 'cannot be justified intrinsically. Rather, it [the current political and economic system] must be overcome and eliminated.'¹⁵

Part of Foucault's difficulty with Chomsky's foundation for resistance and activism is epistemological. In *The Order of Things*, published in 1966, Foucault goes to great lengths to show that the concept 'Man' is not something absolute nor enduring but rather is a construction of sorts appearing relatively recently in our history. According to Foucault, 'Man' is a point or focus of three distinct axes of knowledge, those of Life, Labour and Language, which only emerge in the late eighteenth century. So, one of Foucault's tasks in this work is to show that far from being an absolute term, 'Man' is rather a historical fabrication, whose existence is contingent and, therefore, whose existence may one day very well be 'erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea'.¹⁶ Thus, Foucault's goal, much like that of Kant two cen-

turies earlier, is one of forcing us to realize 'that it is absolutely inevitable and fateful that we awake from our anthropological slumber.'¹⁷

But the epistemological problem for Foucault underlies a greater political and ethical problem. As I see it, Foucault's principle objection to Chomsky's 'vision', is that it is potentially dangerous. The reason, quite simply, is that to advocate protesting, resisting and fighting, in the name of a higher ideal, may be morally and politically disastrous. For to fight in the name of something higher than ourselves, our families and even our communities, may lead to the sacrifice of those very things that we hold most precious - those very things, in other words, that we would fight and perhaps, even die *for*. Certainly, from a historical standpoint, this most certainly seems to be true. Wars and revolutions have been fought for a variety of ideals and causes ranging from God and Freedom, to the Fatherland. All of these transcendent and abstract causes and ideals have served to incite the masses to commit bloody and sometimes pointless slaughter. The danger lies precisely in allowing one's self to be duped by fighting in the *name of the name* - that is, fighting for an ideal that transcends all earthly concerns. It is for this reason that Foucault's response to Chomsky is in historical terms and may have suggested to both Chomsky and others that Foucault is an historical amoral relativist. As Foucault put it:

On the other hand, when we discussed the problem of human nature and political problems, then differences arose between us. And contrary to what you think, you can't prevent me from believing that these notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings, are all notions and concepts which have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy, and that as a result form part of our class system; and one can't, however regrettable it may be, put forward these notions to describe or justify a fight which should - and shall in principle - overthrow the fundamentals of our society. This is an extrapolation for which I can't find the historical justification. That's the point...¹⁸

The point that Chomsky seems to have missed is that there is a chance that he may be wrong. There is a chance that although we may think we have pulled back the curtain and exposed the true reality that underlay the subterfuge, nevertheless, we may, down the road, commit more atrocities and even more violence than we could ever have imagined or intended. Foucault clearly states this concern to Chomsky in a direct manner:

The result is that you too realized, I think, that it is difficult to say exactly what human nature is. Isn't there a risk that we will be led into error? Mao Tse Tsung spoke of bourgeois nature and proletarian nature, and he considers they are not the same thing.¹⁹

And, I think, we are well aware what measures Mao undertook to realize *his* conception of human nature.

Interestingly, Foucault's point is not that novel. In 1952, Eric Vogelin wrote in *The New Science of Politics* of this very phenomenon that would consume our twentieth century consciousness for decades to come. He called it the new Gnosticism. And, just like the Gnostics of old, the new Gnostics, the twentieth century versions in their myriad of forms, believe that they too have an inside track to the truth - a special relationship to Being that allows them and only them, to understand the mysterious workings of reality. Vogelin writes:

Gnosis may be primarily intellectual and assume the speculative penetration of the mystery of creation and existence, as, for instance, in the contemplative gnosis of Hegel or Schelling. Or it may be primarily emotional and assume the form of an indwelling of divine substance in the human soul, as, for instance, in paracletic sectarian leaders. Or it may be primarily volitional and assume the form of an activist redemption of man and society, as in the instance of revolutionary activists like Comte, Marx or Hitler.²⁰

The danger of the Gnostic position is not just that he or she believes that their 'vision' is the only correct one, but also that an attempt is made to map this 'vision' onto reality. The new Gnostic, to paraphrase Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, does not merely try to understand the world but tries to change it. And so, to put Foucault's point another way, one could ask the question: is there not a danger that Chomsky's desire to return to humanity's 'natural instincts' and needs is really a revival of this age old Gnostic concern?²¹ Is it not the case that Chomsky believes that we should map our political, economic and even moral systems according to our true human natures as he conceives them to be?

So far, we have discussed the inability of various 'leftist' individuals to communicate and/or effectively appreciate their comrade's position. And, I think we have seen that Foucault's ideas, particularly, have been somewhat distort-

ed. However, at this point, one may very well accuse me of being closed to open debate and therefore not seeing Chomsky's fully developed position. Are my arguments an irrational, reactionary response to Chomsky's stance, because I am not in agreement with him? Or worse, as Chomsky has suggested in *Manufacturing Consent*, is it possible, that I, as a scholar to be, have been somehow tricked by a falsifying, academic discourse that mystifies the 'truth'?²² Certainly Chomsky could very well respond in such a manner and, indeed, has done so before. He writes, for example, in *Language and Politics* that 'the intelligentsia is the most subject to effective indoctrination....they have the least understanding of what is happening in the world, in fact, [they] tend to have an institutionalized stupidity.'²³ And furthermore Chomsky suggests that:

It is pretty close to tautological [that] education is a form of indoctrination, therefore, we typically find in any society that the educated classes are the most indoctrinated. They're the ones who are subjected to the constant flow of propaganda which is largely directed to them because they're the most important, so they have to be controlled.²⁴

In short, am I, as Chomsky implies, 'an instrument of propaganda'?²⁵

To be sure, there may be no way of convincing others, or even myself, that I am completely free of any ideological indoctrination. The only response I can provide is to treat Chomsky's position in more detail and argue as strongly as I can for Chomsky's point of view. That is, to argue with the same zeal for the other's position as I argue for my own. It is this zeal that *must* be the single most important criterion in order to have an open debate that seeks to bring the truth to light. Accordingly, I will now turn to Chomsky's defense.

Now, surely Chomsky would argue that his foundation of human nature cannot be compared to that of Vogel's Gnostics. For one thing, Chomsky's notion of human nature is neither irrational nor intellectualized, but could be based on sound, scientific, empirical evidence, analogously to Chomsky's arguments for a Universal and Transformative Grammar in linguistics. Chomsky writes:

That is, just as people somehow can construct an extraordinarily rich system of knowledge of language on the basis of rather limited and

degenerate experience, similarly, people develop implicit systems of moral evaluation which are more or less uniform from person to person.²⁶

To account for this basic fact, Chomsky draws on his work in linguistics to suggest that morality, like language, is a biological capacity in which it may be possible to:

...establish a social science based on empirically well-founded propositions regarding human nature. Just as we study the range of humanly attainable languages, with some success, we might also try to study the forms of artistic expression or, for that matter, scientific knowledge that humans can conceive, and perhaps even the range of *ethical systems and social structures* in which humans can live and function, given their *intrinsic capacities and needs*. Perhaps one might go on to project a concept of social organization that would - under given conditions of material and spiritual culture - best encourage and accommodate the fundamental human need - if such it is - for *spontaneous initiative, creative work, solidarity, and the pursuit of social justice*.²⁷ (Emphasis added)

In many of his later works, Chomsky himself has pioneered and further developed this new social science. In an interview entitled 'Language Theory and the Theory of Justice' that took place in 1977, Chomsky likens his notion of a naturalistic foundation for morality to that of a:

...biological endowment which...leads to the growth of the *mental organ* of moral evaluation... in effect, it requires us to develop a system of moral judgement and a theory of justice, if you like, that in fact has detailed applicability over an enormous range.²⁸

To be certain, this still means that the environmental conditions necessary for our moral organ to fully develop must be present - our innate moral structures cannot do it alone. But nonetheless, there is a code or design that, given the proper environmental conditions, allows the moral organ to develop 'just as in the case for the body.'²⁹

No doubt this seems to be true - we are able to understand what ought to be done in a large number of moral contexts that are not specifically learned and which do not require deliberation. Though on the other hand there seems to be just as much immorality and destructiveness amongst people as there is

kindness. That is, in some situations, our first instinct may be to act violently towards others before we realize that this course of action may not be the best one. The case could also be made that there is a strong human capacity for violence that is both directed against our enemies and even our selves. Furthermore, it could certainly be argued that destructiveness, selfishness and wickedness are just as much natural human instincts as what, for Chomsky, are the 'decent' instincts towards freedom and solidarity. Indeed, this point is driven home to us everyday. Quite simply, violence is all around us - we both consciously and unconsciously recognize this sad fact in our most common and mundane circumstances of existence. As Thomas Hobbes clearly noted many centuries ago in his work *Leviathan*:

It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed things; that nature should thus dissociate, and render man apt to invade, and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this inference, made from the passions desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by experience. Let him therefore consider with himself, when taking a journey, he arms himself, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doors; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there be laws, and public officers, armed, to revenge all injuries shall be done to him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse man's nature in it.³⁰

And one cannot accuse human nature in this, and therefore cannot morally censure humans, precisely because *it is their nature*. Just as one cannot blame the bird of prey for eating the sheep because they are delicious, one, that is, cannot blame the strong for feeding upon the weak since, after all, this is the very law of Nature herself.³¹ Of course, the sheep may cry, just as Therese in *Justine* cries in vain begging for mercy asking: 'is there no other alternative?'³² By adopting a naturalistic justification for morality the danger is that one may simply reply a la Le Couer de Fer: 'No, because, Therese, we have got you, and because the stronger is always the better reason.'³³

One might expect that Chomsky would have to admit that violence, destructiveness, and simple wickedness are characteristics that arise only as a result of degenerate environmental conditions. But Chomsky in point of fact,

agrees with both Hobbes and the Marquis de Sade. He agrees that selfishness, destructiveness and even wickedness, are natural instincts. He writes in *Powers and Prospects*, for example, that there are 'moral monsters' and that when confronted with these people:

It is a waste of time and a pointless pursuit to speak the truth to Henry Kissinger, or the CEO of General Motors, or others who exercise power in coercive institutions - truths that they already know well enough, for the most part... These same people who wield power, are hardly worth addressing, any more than the worst tyrants and criminals, who are also human beings and should be held responsible for their actions however terrible.³⁴

In addition, the conditions that make possible these moral monsters are natural instincts and capacities. In his last retort to Foucault in the debate, Chomsky reveals the problematic nature of his basis for resistance and the fundamental contradiction in his philosophical position:

Yeah, but what I'm arguing is this: if we have the choice between trusting in centralized power to make the right decision in that matter; or trusting in free associations of libertarian communities to make that decision, I would rather trust the latter. And the reason is that I think that they can serve to maximize decent human instincts, whereas the system of centralized power will tend in a general way to maximize one of the worst of *human instincts*, namely the *instinct of rapaciousness, of destructiveness, of accumulating power to oneself and destroying others*. It's a kind of *instinct* which does arise and function in certain historical circumstances, and I think we want to create a society where it is likely to be *repressed and replaced* by other more *healthy instincts*.³⁵ (Emphasis added)

But what justification could Chomsky possibly present for repressing and even replacing natural instincts? Did he not just argue that the problem with our current form of government and economic system is that it represses and stifles our natural instincts of solidarity and for creative work? And was it not the case that because these are, as he says, natural capacities, that any system which attempts to prohibit these natural instincts from flourishing is therefore immoral? Finally, how would Chomsky go about determining which natural instincts were healthy and which were unhealthy if his model in determining proper moral instincts were those that were natural to humans in the first place?

As is perhaps now obvious, there is a great danger in this sort of talk and I think, as Foucault later shows, in his genealogical inquires, there is an even greater danger of this sort of talk as a proper academic discourse, the reason being that power and knowledge are inextricably linked. Academic discourses mould and sometimes contort our views of the physical world, our societies and even how we come to think and relate to our own selves. Simply put, *disciplines, discipline* Academic disciplines determine what can be said and what cannot be said. Who is allowed to say it and who is not allowed. In short, they map, categorize, stratify and ultimately, territorialize both the exterior world and the interior one as well. They transform the way we think and the danger is not in this transformation itself, but rather in thinking that this is the *only* way to think. That our thinking follows the 'norm', whatever that norm may be. The goal of political resistance therefore, should not be determining what our limits are and then staying within these limits but rather in thinking 'the outside' of these limits. That is, as Foucault says in one of his last responses in the debate: 'Rather, than thinking of the social struggle in terms of "justice" one has to emphasize justice in terms of the social struggle.' And this social struggle takes place just as much on the battlefield of exterior existence as it does within 'Inner Existence'. One could say that the goal is not to discover who we are but to discover the infinite number of 'whos' that make us who we are. And one could add, that it is also necessary to reflect upon and *expose* the finite number of '*whoms*' that attempt to make us *whom* we are.

We use whom, in English, when the subject is referred to as an object, as in the salutation: 'To Whom it may concern'. And just as in this case, where whom takes the place for a proper name or person, so too, the social sciences often would like to think of us as place holders for types, conditions, and models. IQ tests, EQ tests, aptitude tests, drug tests, behavioural tests, etc. attempt to quantify 'us' and name 'us' so that they can replace 'us'. Thus, it is also necessary to reflect upon those discourses that would also seek to objectify us so that we may be better controlled. 'We' must demonstrate that one cannot map the human subject as one maps the human body. One can never map the heartland of subjectivity precisely because any map only exists because of that which is unmapped. We are precisely that which can never be traced, nor circumscribed. We are, simultaneously, Daedalus's great Labyrinth but, we must also recognize, we are its Minotaur.³⁶

Still Chomsky might argue, this may all be well and good - cautiousness in political resistance is a good thing but at what point does cautiousness turn

into political paralysis or, worse yet, cynicism? To argue, as Foucault does, that power will always be with us, or that any political movement can be co-opted by power, begs the question: 'Why fight at all?'³⁷ If there can be no moral or political progress, as Foucault seems to suggest, then 'why is struggle preferable to submission?'³⁸ No doubt this is a serious problem and I do not think either Foucault or his sympathizers have adequately addressed it.³⁹ Nonetheless, this does not mean that we steadfastly hold onto a political theory at all costs, hoping that the difficulties with such a theory will be 'ironed out' as some Marxists seem to hold. Rather, what it means is that we must continue to build and improve upon past political theories while also being open minded enough to examine new ones. Ultimately, it means being open to the Other so that we can truly learn from them but also being open to our own self-transformation and creativity. It is for this reason that Foucault emphasizes the third axis of genealogical inquiry, that of the ethical dimension, towards the end of his life. For in order to participate in an anarcho-syndicalist society, or one based upon an ideal speech situation pace Habermas, or whatever, one must cultivate and develop one's ethical self first. That is, one must truly seek understanding through dialogue, not rhetoric, and more importantly, accept criticism of one's position by another. Such a task for the intellectual or the ordinary citizen cannot get underway by reforming institutions, governments, or laws. It must start with the individual and must continue to be a practice or ethos for the individual throughout his or her life. As Foucault says in one of his last interviews:

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as a means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behavior of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.⁴⁰

Now, what Foucault means by 'the ethos, the practice of the self' is something that he underscores in his last lectures at Le College de France and at Berkeley, that is, the ancient Greek concept of Parrhesia - the art of telling the truth through right conduct and speech.⁴¹ For the parrhesiast, then, to speak the truth and to speak the truth plainly, is a moral obligation. It is an obligation that binds oneself to one's character or 'life practice' and one that also binds one to the other. For such a practice guarantees the autonomy of

the individual as a 'subject' while simultaneously, such an ethos through its commitment to tell the truth and act on the truth, can be the start of a grass-roots political movement. Arguably, this may still seem unsatisfactory for Chomsky and many others since the commercial media, the most popular mode of transmission of information, is not interested in 'the truth for truth's sake'. Nevertheless, as Foucault realizes in the twilight of his years, a true political movement must first start with this less than ambitious goal. In short, a political order must start with the individual first so as not to overstep the unconditional moral order of the subject.

Finally, and to sum up, I would like to say that I am not a neo-Luddite - although knowledge is always linked to power this does not mean that knowledge in itself, is evil. Nor am I advocating that Chomsky's project of founding a new social science that would investigate an organic approach to moral development should cease or be abandoned. My point, rather, is that these sciences can never be and *should* never be, the final word on the subject. For to be the final word on the subject of our own subjectivity would be to do violence to this very subjectivity in the first place. It is to violate that which is unbounded, untraceable and unlimited by placing boundaries and definitions upon our selves. We must, therefore, continue to speak, believe, and be committed to telling the truth no matter what the circumstances or consequences may be. But the paradox seems to lie in this very remark: if we know the 'truth' then are we not obliged to take action? And correspondingly, how tolerant can and must a person be, if one is speaking truthfully while believing that the other is not? If I know the 'truth' am I obliged to give 'full play' to the opposition? That is, am I obliged to understand and perhaps even defend the other side with the same zeal I bring to the 'truth' in an open debate?⁴² The answer, I think, is a definite yes, that is, if one steadfastly 'believes too much in the truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth.'⁴³

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Notes

1. To be certain, I think Foucault is more open minded than Chomsky but, nevertheless, fails to fully appreciate the novelty of Chomsky's position.
2. Fons Elders, 'Human Nature: Justice versus Power, Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault' (1971), in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 107. This particular transcript of the debate was deemed accurate by both Chomsky and Foucault.
3. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1994), pp. 201-203.
4. See chapters 5,6 and 7 in James Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault*.
5. See Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965).
6. Michel Foucault, *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 129.
7. See Nicholas Dent's article 'Amorality' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 27.
8. Michel Foucault, *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 130.
9. See p. 131, p. 135 and p. 142 in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, where Foucault discusses a number of moral problems ranging from violence to the treatment of the mentally ill.
10. See also Milan Rai's, *Chomsky's Politics* (London: Verso Press, 1995) where Rai infers that Foucault's ideas are 'crazy' p.151. In addition, some scholars who are sympathetic to Foucault have also argued that Chomsky seems to get the better in this debate. Ian Hacking, for example, writes: 'The linguist (Chomsky) comes across as a marvellously sane reformist liberal: let's get justice working right. Foucault sounds more like an anarchist: destroy the judicial system.' ('The Archaeology of Foucault' in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 27-40) Hacking will later defend Foucault from these charges by interpreting Foucault's responses in the debate within his larger philosophical corpus. However, what I shall show is that a careful reading of the debate alone is sufficient to reveal Foucault to be the 'sane' one.
11. James McGilvray, *Chomsky, Language, Mind and Politics* (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 1999), p. 235.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
13. Noam Chomsky, *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 128.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 387.
17. Michel Foucault, 'Philosophie et Psychologie' (1965) in *Dits et Ecrits* edited by Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Paris: Gallimard Press, 1994), Volume 1, p. 448, (my translation).

18. Michel Foucault, *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 140.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
20. Eric Vogelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 168.
21. The Gnostics were a sect of Christian mystics that appeared in the second century A.D. They believed that they alone had knowledge of both God and the meaning of spiritual existence here on earth. Vogelin is arguing that just like the Gnostics of old, so too, the new Gnostics claim they understand the mysterious inner workings of Being and reality.
22. See Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).
23. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*, ed. C.P. Otero (New York: Black Rose Books, 1988), p. 599.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 765.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
27. Noam Chomsky, 'Language and Freedom' in *The Chomsky Reader*, ed. James Peck (London: Serpent's Tail Publishing, 1987), p. 155.
28. Noam Chomsky, *Language and Politics*, p. 241.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott, (New York: Collins Books, 1966), pp. 100-101.
31. This analogy is, of course, a reference to another dark writer of the Enlightenment Friedrich Nietzsche. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Towards the Genealogy of Morals I:13* in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, ed. Peter Gay (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), p. 481.
32. Marquis de Sade, *Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, compiled and translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhaus (New York: Grove Press, 1965), p. 487.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 487.
34. Noam Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), p. 61.
35. Noam Chomsky, *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 145.
36. Both Foucault and Nietzsche interpreted this well known myth to be a window into the 'human' condition.
37. See Jurgen Habermas' brilliant criticism of Foucault in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Fredrick Lawrence (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1987) p. 284.
38. See Nancy Fraser's 'Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions' in *Unruly Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
39. Indeed, the question: 'Why fight at all?' is not even a proper formulation of the problem. The proper question should be: 'How is resistance possible?' For to ask why

- already presupposes that the individual has a choice to either submit to power or not. However, if we are the very 'vehicles of power' (See 'Two Lectures', p. 98 in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Essays*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980)) and furthermore, it is always possible for any act of political resistance to be co-opted by power (see 'Body/Power' in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 57), then how can we ever be sure that we are not merely puppets of power? Therefore, the question: 'How is "resistance" even possible?' seems more appropriate. For a possible solution to this question, see my paper: 'Foucault's Enlightenment: The Saturnalia of Mad Joy' forthcoming in an edition of *Joyful Wisdom: A Post Modern Ethics of Joy*.
40. Michel Foucault 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984', in *The Final Foucault*, eds. Bernhauer and Rassmussen (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1988), p. 18.
 41. Foucault explains in his 1983 lecture at Berkeley, that the Greek word Parrhesia, can be seen in the work of Euripides to connote the practice of telling the truth simply and plainly. See Foucault's Berkeley lectures at <http://foucault.info/documents/parrhesia/Lecture-01/>. Also see Thomas Flynn's 'Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France (1984)' in *The Final Foucault*, pp. 102-118.
 42. Charles Willard, *A Theory of Argumentation* (Tuscaloosa Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1989), p. 234.
 43. Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Interviews and other Writings 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 51.

In ancient Greece, people told myths to explain the ways of the world. Myths often portrayed brave heroes and vicious monsters. The ancient Greeks also believed in powerful gods who watched over Earth and intervened when they saw fit. In this particular myth, a prince from Greece's capital city of Athens travels by sea to another city, Crete, in order to fight a monster. Read "The Chomsky-Foucault Debate On Human Nature" by Noam Chomsky available from Rakuten Kobo. In this historic 1971 debate, two of the twentieth century's most influential thinkers discuss whether there is such a thing. In addition to the debate itself, this volume features a newly written introduction by noted Foucault scholar John Rajchman and includes substantial additional texts by Chomsky and Foucault. "Chomsky is] arguably the most important intellectual alive." The New York Times. "Foucault . . . leaves no reader untouched or unchanged." Edward Said. Edition unavailable in Russia. As in the debate with Chomsky, he is really really hesitant to try to make a claim about what is "supposed" to be in human relations and "human nature." Marx made a lot of claims about what he thought defined "human nature" and what was "truly" the course of the technologically advanced societies. Open Culture scours the web for the best educational media. We find the free courses and audio books you need, the language lessons & educational videos you want, and plenty of enlightenment in between. Advertise With Us. Great Recordings.