

Politics and Ethics

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Totalization

- Politics offers totalizing theories
- These theories, such as Marxism, try to bring all political phenomena under relatively few principles
- But this is abstract and limiting
- Foucault is attempting to open up concrete and general problems, e.g., illness, crime, sexuality
- These problems must be treated as ones concerning knowledge, politics, and morality

An Heir of Nietzsche

- Habermas charged that Nietzsche had two kind of heirs: conservative and anarchistic
- Heidegger is classified as a conservative heir, who supported Nazism
- This is supposed to discredit Nietzsche
- Foucault is said to be an anarchistic heir, whose ties to Nietzsche discredit him

An Ethics of Theory and Practice?

- It may be that the attempt to link theory and practice is itself a kind of ethics, though with political results
- Foucault responds that this is still too theoretical, that “ethics is a practice; ethos is a manner of being”
- Ethics is aimed at effective action

Theory and Practice

- Foucault responds that the link between a philosophical theory and political practice is tenuous
- It is the ethos of the philosopher, not his ideas, that matters
- Sartre, a philosopher of engagement, did nothing in the French Resistance against the Nazis
- The proper attitude toward a theory is to link it with movements that call it into question

Consensus

- Habermas and Arendt have proposed that power is positive when people act consensually
- Foucault agrees that we may use consensus as a critical principle, but this does not remove the problem of power-relations
- It may be a verbal ploy to dissociate power from domination
- And it may be that domination is required for positive results, as in teaching

Generalization

- Consensus is not a regulatory principle, because this imposes an ordering of its own
- The critical issue is how much non-consensus is necessary
- Disciplinary power is not necessarily ordering, but it can be very dangerous
- There are consensual disciplines
- But the study of consensus, ordering, discipline in any one arena cannot be generalized to all relations of power