

QUESTIONS OF METHOD*

WHY THE PRISON?

Q: *Why do you see the birth of the prison—and, in particular, this process you call “hurried substitution,” which in the early years of the nineteenth century establishes the prison at the center of the new penal system—as being so important?*

Aren't you inclined to overstate the importance of the prison in penal history, given that other quite distinct modes of punishment (the death penalty, the penal colonies, deportation) remained in effect too? At the level of historical methods, you seem to scorn explanations in terms of causality or structure, and sometimes to prioritize a description of a process that is purely one of events. No doubt, it's true that the pre-occupation with “social history” has invaded historians' work in an uncontrolled manner; but even if one does not accept the “social” as the only valid level of historical explanation, is it right for you to throw out social history altogether from your “interpretative diagram”?

A: I wouldn't want what I may have said or written to be seen as laying any claims to totality. I don't try to universalize what I say; conversely, what I don't say isn't meant to be thereby disqualified as being of no importance. My work takes place between unfinished abutments and anticipatory strings of dots. I like to open up a space of research, try it out, and then if it doesn't work, try again somewhere else. On many points—I am thinking especially of the relations between dialectics, genealogy, and strategy—I am still

working and don't yet know whether I am going to get anywhere. What I say ought to be taken as "propositions," "game openings" where those who may be interested are invited to join in—they are not meant as dogmatic assertions that have to be taken or left en bloc. My books aren't treatises in philosophy or studies of history; at most, they are philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems.

I will attempt to answer the questions that have been posed. First, about the prison. You wonder whether it was as important as I have claimed, or whether it acted as the real focus of the penal system. I don't mean to suggest that the prison was the essential core of the entire penal system; nor am I saying that it would be impossible to approach the problems of penal history—not to speak of the history of crime in general—by other routes than the history of the prison. But it seemed to me legitimate to take the prison as my object, for two reasons. First, because it had been rather neglected in previous analyses; when people had set out to study the problems of "the penal order" [*pénalité*]¹—a confused enough term, in any case—they usually opted to prioritize one of two directions: either the sociological problem of the criminal population, or the juridical problem of the penal system and its basis. The actual practice of punishment was scarcely studied except, in the line of the Frankfurt School, by Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer. There have indeed been studies of prisons as institutions, but very few of imprisonment as a general punitive practice in our societies.

My second reason for wanting to study the prison was the idea of reactivating the project of a "genealogy of morals," one that worked by tracing the lines of transformation of what one might call "moral technologies." In order to get a better understanding of what is punished and why, I wanted to ask the question *how* does one punish? This was the same procedure as I had used when dealing with madness: rather than asking *what*, in a given period, is regarded as sanity or insanity, as mental illness or normal behavior, I wanted to ask *how* these divisions are effected. It's a method that seems to me to yield—I wouldn't say the maximum of possible illumination—at least a fairly fruitful kind of intelligibility.

There was also, while I was writing this book, a contemporary issue relating to the prison and, more generally, to the numerous aspects of penal practice being brought into question. This devel-

opment was noticeable not only in France but also in the United States, Britain, and Italy. Incidentally, it would be interesting to consider why all these problems about confinement, internment, the penal dressage of individuals and their distribution, classification, and objectification through forms of knowledge came to be posed so urgently at this time, well in advance of May 1968: the themes of antipsychiatry were formulated around 1958 to 1960. The connection with the matter of the concentration camps is evident—look at Bruno Bettelheim.¹ But one would need to analyze more closely what took place around 1960.

In this piece of research on the prisons, as in my other earlier work, the target of analysis wasn't "institutions," "theories," or "ideology" but *practices*—with the aim of grasping the conditions that make these acceptable at a given moment; the hypothesis being that these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances—whatever role these elements may actually play—but, up to a point, possess their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence, and "reason." It is a question of analyzing a "regime of practices"—practices being understood here as places where what is said and what is done, rules imposed and reasons given, the planned and the taken-for-granted meet and interconnect.

To analyze "regimes of practices" means to analyze programs of conduct that have both prescriptive effects regarding what is to be done (effects of "jurisdiction") and codifying effects regarding what is to be known (effects of "veridiction").

So I was aiming to write a history not of the prison as an institution, but of the *practice of imprisonment*: to show its origin or, more exactly, to show how this way of doing things—ancient enough in itself—was capable of being accepted at a certain moment as a principal component of the penal system, thus coming to seem an altogether natural, self-evident, and indispensable part of it.

It's a matter of shaking this false self-evidence, of demonstrating its precariousness, of making visible not its arbitrariness but its complex interconnection with a multiplicity of historical processes, many of them of recent date. From this point of view, I can say that the history of penal imprisonment exceeded my wildest hopes. All the early nineteenth-century texts and discussions testify to the astonishment at finding the prison being used as a general means

of punishment—something that had not at all been what the eighteenth-century reformers had had in mind. I did not at all take this sudden change—which was what its contemporaries recognized it as being—as marking a result at which one’s analysis could stop. I took this discontinuity, this—in a sense—“phenomenal” set of mutations, as my starting point and tried, without eradicating it, to account for it. It was a matter not of digging down to a buried stratum of continuity, but of identifying the transformation that made this hurried transition possible.

As you know, no one is more of a continuist than I am: to recognize a discontinuity is never anything more than to register a problem that needs to be solved.

EVENTALIZATION

Q: *What you have just said clears up a number of things. All the same, historians have been troubled by a sort of equivocation in your analyses, a sort of oscillation between “hyperrationalism” and “infrarationality.”*

A: I am trying to work in the direction of what one might call “eventalization.” Even though the “event” has been for some while now a category little esteemed by historians, I wonder whether, understood in a certain sense, “eventalization” may not be a useful procedure of analysis. What do I mean by this term? First of all, a breach of self-evidence. It means making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait, or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all. To show that things “weren’t as necessary as all that”; it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock him up; it wasn’t self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through the individual examination of bodies; and so on. A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences, and practices rest: this is the first theoretico-political function of “eventalization.”

Second, eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on,

that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary. In this sense, one is indeed effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes.

Does this mean that one regards the singularity one is analyzing simply as a fact to be registered, a reasonless break in an inert continuum? Clearly not, since that would amount to treating continuity as a self-sufficient reality that carries its own *raison d'être* within itself.

This procedure of causal multiplication means analyzing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it. So, to analyze the practice of penal incarceration as an "event" (not as an institutional fact or ideological effect) means to determine the processes of "penalization" (that is, progressive insertion into the forms of legal punishment) of already existing practices of internment; the processes of "carceralization" of practices of penal justice (that is, the movement by which imprisonment as a form of punishment and technique of correction becomes a central component of the penal order). And these vast processes need themselves to be further broken down: the penalization of internment comprises a multiplicity of processes such as the formation of closed pedagogical spaces functioning through rewards, punishments, and so on.

As a way of lightening the weight of causality, "eventalization" thus works by constructing around the singular event analyzed as process a "polygon" or, rather, "polyhedron" of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite. One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation. And one has to bear in mind that the further one breaks down the processes under analysis, the more one is enabled and indeed obliged to construct their external relations of intelligibility. (In concrete terms: the more one analyzes the process of "carceralization" of penal practice down to its smallest details, the more one is led to relate them to such practices as schooling, military discipline, and so on.) The internal analysis of processes goes hand in hand with a multiplication of analytical "salients."

This operation thus leads to an increasing polymorphism as the analysis progresses:

1. A polymorphism of the elements brought into relation: starting from the prison, one introduces the history of pedagogical practices, the formation of professional armies, British empirical philosophy, techniques of use of firearms, new methods of division of labor.
2. A polymorphism of relations described: these may concern the transposition of technical models (such as architectures of surveillance), tactics calculated in response to a particular situation (such as the growth of banditry, the disorder provoked by public tortures and executions, the defects of the practice of penal banishment), or the application of theoretical schemas (such as those representing the genesis of ideas and the formation of signs, the utilitarian conception of behavior, and so on).
3. A polymorphism of domains of reference (varying in their nature, generality, and so on), ranging from technical mutations in matters of detail to the attempted emplacement in a capitalist economy of new techniques of power designed in response to the exigencies of that economy.

Forgive this long detour, but it enables me to better reply to your question about hyper- and hyporationalisms, one that is often put to me.

It has been some time since historians lost their love of events and made “de-eventalization” their principle of historical intelligibility. The way they work is by ascribing the object they analyze to the most unitary, necessary, inevitable, and (ultimately) extrahistorical mechanism or structure available. An economic mechanism, an anthropological structure, or a demographic process that figures the climactic stage in the investigation—these are the goals of de-eventalized history. (Of course, these remarks are only intended as a crude specification of a certain broad tendency.)

Clearly, viewed from the standpoint of this style of analysis, what I am proposing is at once too much and too little. There are too many diverse kinds of relations, too many lines of analysis, yet at the same time there is too little necessary unity. A plethora of intelligibilities, a deficit of necessities.

But for me this is precisely the point at issue, both in historical

analysis and in political critique. We aren't, nor do we have to put ourselves, under the sign of a unitary necessity.

THE PROBLEM OF RATIONALITIES

Q: *I would like to pause for a moment on this question of eventalization, because it lies at the center of a certain number of misunderstandings about your work. (I am not talking about the misguided portrayal of you as a "thinker of discontinuity.") Behind the identifying of breaks and the careful, detailed charting of these networks of relations that engender a reality and a history, there persists from one book to the next something amounting to one of those historical constants or anthropologico-cultural traits you were objecting to just now: this version of a general history of rationalization spanning three or four centuries, or at any rate of a history of one particular kind of rationalization as it progressively takes effect in our society. It's not by chance that your first book was a history of reason as well as of madness, and I believe that the themes of all your other books, the analysis of different techniques of isolation, the social taxonomies, and so on—all this boils down to one and the same meta-anthropological or meta-historical process of rationalization. In this sense, the "eventalization" you define here as central to your work seems to me to constitute only one of its extremes.*

A: If one calls "Weberians" those who set out to trade off [re]layer the Marxist analysis of the contradictions of capital for that of the irrational rationality of capitalist society, then I don't think I am a Weberian, since my basic preoccupation isn't rationality considered as an anthropological invariant. I don't believe one can speak of an intrinsic notion of "rationalization" without, on the one hand, positing an absolute value inherent in reason, and, on the other, taking the risk of applying the term empirically in a completely arbitrary way. I think one must restrict one's use of this word to an instrumental and relative meaning. The ceremony of public torture isn't in itself more irrational than imprisonment in a cell; but it's irrational in terms of a type of penal practice that involves new ways of envisaging the effects to be produced by the penalty imposed, new ways of calculating its utility, justifying it, fixing its degrees and so on. One isn't assessing things in terms of an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect

forms of rationality but, rather, examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices or systems of practices, and what role they play within them—because it's true that “practices” don't exist without a certain regime of rationality. But, rather than measuring this regime against a value of reason, I would prefer to analyze it according to two axes: on the one hand, that of codification/prescription (how it forms an ensemble of rules, procedures, means to an end, and so on), and, on the other, that of true or false formulation (how it determines a domain of objects about which it is possible to articulate true or false propositions).

If I have studied “practices” such as those of the sequestration of the insane, or clinical medicine, or the organization of the empirical sciences, or legal punishment, it was in order to study this interplay between a “code” that governs ways of doing things (how people are to be graded and examined, things and signs classified, individuals trained [*trier*], and so on) and a production of true discourses that served to found, justify, and provide reasons and principles for these ways of doing things. To put the matter clearly: my problem is to see how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth (I repeat once again that by production of truth I mean 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).

Eventualizing singular ensembles of practices, so as to make them graspable as different regimes of “jurisdiction” and “veridiction”: that, to put it in exceedingly barbarous terms, is what I would like to do. You see that this is neither a history of knowledge [*connaissances*] nor an analysis of the advancing rationalities that rule our society, nor an anthropology of the codifications that, without our knowledge, rule our behavior. I would like, in short, to resituate the production of true and false at the heart of historical analysis and political critique.

Q: *It's not an accident that you speak of Max Weber. There is in your work—no doubt, in a sense you wouldn't want to accept—a sort of “ideal type” that paralyzes and mutes analysis when one tries to account for reality. Isn't this what led you to abstain from all commentary when you published the memoir of Pierre Rivère?*

A: I don't think your comparison with Max Weber is exact. Sche-

matically, one can say that the “ideal type” is a category of historical interpretation: it’s a structure of understanding for the historian who seeks to integrate, after the fact, a certain set of data—it allows him to recapture an “essence” (Calvinism, the state, the capitalist enterprise), working from general principles that are not at all present in the thought of the individuals whose concrete behavior is nevertheless to be understood on their basis.

When I try to analyze the rationalities proper of penal imprisonment, the psychiatrization of madness, or the organization of the domain of sexuality, and when I lay stress on the fact that the real functioning of institutions isn’t confined to the unfolding of this rational schema in its pure form, is this an analysis in terms of “ideal types”? I don’t think so, for a number of reasons.

The rational schemas of the prison, the hospital, or the asylum are not general principles that can be rediscovered only through the historian’s retrospective interpretation. They are explicit *programs*; we are dealing with sets of calculated, reasoned prescriptions in terms of which institutions are meant to be recognized, spaces arranged, behaviors regulated. If they have an ideality, it is that of a programming left in abeyance, not that of a general but hidden meaning.

Of course, this programming depends on forms of rationality much more general than those they directly implement. I tried to show that the rationality envisaged in penal imprisonment wasn’t the outcome of a straightforward calculation of immediate interest (internment turning out to be, in the last analysis, the simplest and cheapest solution), but that it arose out of a whole technology of human training, surveillance of behavior, individualization of the elements of a social body. “Discipline” isn’t the expression of an “ideal type” (that of “disciplined man”); it’s the generalization and interconnection of different techniques themselves designed in response to localized requirements (schooling, training troops to handle rifles).

These programs don’t take effect in the institutions in an integral way; they are simplified, or some are chosen and not others; and things never work out as planned. But what I wanted to show is that this difference is not one between the purity of the ideal and the disorderly impurity of the real, but that in fact there are different strategies that are mutually opposed, composed, and super-

posed so as to produce permanent and solid effects that can perfectly well be understood in terms of their rationality, even though they don't conform to the initial programming: this is what gives the resulting apparatus its solidity and suppleness.

Programs, technologies, apparatuses—none of these is an “ideal type.” I try to study the play and development of a set of diverse realities articulated onto each other; a program, the connection that explains it, the law that gives it its coercive power, and so on, are all just as much realities—albeit in a different mode—as the institutions that embody them or the behaviors that more or less faithfully conform to them.

You say to me: Nothing happens as laid down in these “programs,” they are no more than dreams, utopias, a sort of imaginary production that you aren't entitled to substitute for reality. Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* isn't a very good description of “real life” in nineteenth-century prisons.

To this I would reply: If I had wanted to describe “real life” in the prisons, I indeed wouldn't have gone to Bentham. But the fact that this real life isn't the same thing as the theoreticians' schemes doesn't entail that these schemes are therefore utopian, imaginary, and so on. One could only think this if one had a very impoverished notion of the real. For one thing, the elaboration of these schemas corresponds to a whole series of diverse practices and strategies: the search for effective, measured, unified penal mechanisms is unquestionably a response to the disalignment of the institutions of judicial power with the new economic forms, urbanization, and so on; again, there is the attempt—very noticeable in a country like France—to reduce the autonomy and insularity of judicial practice and personnel within the overall workings of the state. There is the wish to respond to emerging new forms of criminality, and so on. For another thing, these programs induce a whole series of effects in the real (which isn't of course the same as saying that they take the place of the real): they crystallize into institutions, they inform individual behavior, they act as grids for the perception and evaluation of things. It is absolutely true that criminals stubbornly resisted the new disciplinary mechanism in the prison; it is absolutely correct that the actual functioning of the prisons, in the inherited buildings where they were established and with the governors and guards who administered them, was a witches' brew compared to

the beautiful Benthamite machine. But if the prisons were seen to have failed, if criminals were perceived as incorrigible, and a whole new criminal “race” emerged into the field of vision of public opinion and “justice,” if the resistance of the prisoners and the pattern of recidivism took the forms we know they did, it’s precisely because this type of programming didn’t just remain a utopia in the heads of a few contrivers.

These programmings of behavior, these regimes of jurisdiction and veridiction aren’t abortive schemas for the creation of a reality. They are fragments of reality that induce such particular effects in the real as the distinction between true and false implicit in the ways men “direct,” “govern,” and “conduct” themselves and others. To grasp these effects as historical events—with what this implies for the question of truth (which is the question of philosophy itself)—this is more or less my theme. You see that this has nothing to do with the project—an admirable one in itself—of grasping a “whole society” in its “living reality.”

The question I won’t succeed in answering here but have been asking myself from the beginning is roughly the following: What is history, given that there is continually being produced within it a separation of true and false? By that I mean four things. First, in what sense is the production and transformation of the true/false division characteristic and decisive for our historicity? Second, in what specific ways has this relation operated in Western societies, which produce scientific knowledge whose forms are perpetually changing and whose values are posited as universal? Third, what historical knowledge is possible of a history that itself produces the true/false distinction on which such knowledge depends? Fourth, isn’t the most general of political problems the problem of truth? How can one analyze the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others? The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false—this is what I would call “political spirituality.”

THE ANESTHETIC EFFECT

Q: *There is a question here about the way your analyses have been transmitted and received. For instance, if one talks to social workers in the prisons, one finds that the arrival of Discipline and Punish had an absolutely sterilizing or, rather, anesthetizing effect on them, because they felt your critique had an implacable logic that left them no possible room for initiative. You said just now, talking about eventualization, that you want to work toward breaking up existing self-evidences to show both how they are produced and how they are nevertheless always unstable. It seems to me that the second half of the picture—the aspect of instability—isn't clear.*

A: You're quite right to pose this problem of anesthesia, one that is of capital importance. It's quite true that I don't feel myself capable of effecting the "subversion of all codes," "dislocation of all orders of knowledge," "revolutionary affirmation of violence," "overturning of all contemporary culture"—these hopes and prospectuses that currently underpin all those brilliant intellectual ventures I admire all the more because the worth and previous achievements of those who undertake them guarantees an appropriate outcome. My project is far from being of comparable scope. To give some assistance in wearing away certain self-evidences and commonplaces about madness, normality, illness, crime, and punishment; to bring it about, together with many others, that certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer—or at least no longer so unhesitatingly—performed; to contribute to changing certain things in people's ways of perceiving and doing things; to participate in this difficult displacement of forms of sensibility and thresholds of tolerance—I hardly feel capable of attempting much more than that. If only what I have tried to say might somehow, to some degree, not remain altogether foreign to some such real effects. . . . And yet I realize how much all this can remain precarious, how easily it can all lapse back into somnolence.

But you are right, one has to be more suspicious. Perhaps what I have written has had an anaesthetic effect. But one still needs to distinguish on whom.

To judge by what the psychiatric authorities have had to say, the cohorts on the right who charge me with being against any form of

power, those on the left who call me the “last bulwark of the bourgeoisie” (this isn’t a pronouncement of Kanapa’s—on the contrary), the worthy psychoanalyst who likened me to the Hitler of *Mein Kampf*, the number of times I’ve been “autopsied” and “buried” during the past fifteen years—well, I have the impression of having had an irritant rather than anesthetic effect on a good many people. The epidermises bristle with a constancy I find encouraging. A journal recently warned its readers in deliciously Pétainist style against accepting as a credo what I had had to say about sexuality (“the importance of the subject,” “the personality of the author” rendered my enterprise “dangerous”). No risk of anesthesia in that direction. But I agree with you, these are trifles, amusing to note but tedious to collect. The only important problem is what happens on the ground.

We have known at least since the nineteenth century the difference between anaesthesia and paralysis. Let’s talk about paralysis first. Who has been paralyzed? Do you think what I wrote on the history of psychiatry paralyzed those people who had already been concerned for some time about what was happening in psychiatric institutions? And, seeing what has been happening in and around the prisons, I don’t think the effect of paralysis is very evident there, either. As far as the people in prison are concerned, things aren’t doing too badly. On the other hand, it’s true that certain people, such as those who work in the institutional setting of the prison—which is not quite the same as being in prison—are not likely to find advice or instructions in my books that tell them “what is to be done.” But my project is precisely to bring it about that they “no longer know what to do,” so that the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous. This effect is intentional. And then I have some news for you: for me, the problem of the prisons isn’t one for the “social workers” but one for the prisoners. And on that aside, I’m not so sure what’s been said over the last fifteen years has been quite so—how shall we put it?—demobilizing.

But paralysis isn’t the same thing as anesthesia—on the contrary. It’s insofar as there’s been an awakening to a whole series of problems that the difficulty of doing anything comes to be felt. Not that this effect is an end in itself. But it seems to me that “what is to be done” ought not to be determined from above by reformers, be they

prophetic or legislative, but by a long work of comings and goings, of exchanges, reflections, trials, different analyses. If the social workers you are talking about don't know which way to turn, this just goes to show that they're looking and, hence, are not anesthetized or sterilized at all—on the contrary. And it's because of the need not to tie them down or immobilize them that there can be no question of trying to dictate "what is to be done." If the questions posed by the social workers you spoke of are going to assume their full amplitude, the most important thing is not to bury them under the weight of prescriptive, prophetic discourse. The necessity of reform mustn't be allowed to become a form of blackmail serving to limit, reduce, or halt the exercise of criticism. Under no circumstances should one pay attention to those who tell one: "Don't criticize, since you're not capable of carrying out a reform." That's ministerial cabinet talk. Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, "this, then, is what needs to be done." It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is.

The problem, you see, is one for the subject who acts—the subject of action through which the real is transformed. If prisons and punitive mechanisms are transformed, it won't be because a plan of reform has found its way into the heads of the social workers; it will be when those who have a stake in that reality, all those people, have come into collision with each other and with themselves, run into dead ends, problems, and impossibilities, been through conflicts and confrontations—when critique has been played out in the real, not when reformers have realized their ideas.

Q: *This anesthetic effect has operated on the historians. If they haven't responded to your work it's because, for them, the "Foucauldian schema" was becoming as much of an encumbrance as the Marxist one. I don't know if the "effect" you produce interests you. But the explanations you have given here weren't so clear in Discipline and Punish.*

A: I really wonder whether we are using this word "anesthetize" in the same sense. These historians seemed to me more to be "an-

asthetized,” “irritated” (in Broussais’s sense of the term, of course). Irritated by what? By a schema? I don’t believe so, because there is no schema. If there is an “irritation” (and I seem to recall that in a certain journal a few signs of this irritation may have been discreetly manifested), it’s more because of the absence of a schema. No infra- or superstructure, no Malthusian cycle, no opposition between state and civil society: none of these schemas that have bolstered historians’ operations, explicitly or implicitly, for the past hundred or hundred and fifty years.

Hence, no doubt, the sense of malaise and the questions enjoining me to situate myself within some such schema: “How do you deal with the state? What theory do you offer us of the state?” Some say I neglect its role, others that I see it everywhere, imagining it capable of minutely controlling individuals’ everyday lives. Or that my descriptions leave out all reference to an infrastructure—while others say that I make an infrastructure out of sexuality. The totally contradictory nature of these objections proves that what I am doing doesn’t correspond to any of these schemas.

Perhaps the reason why my work irritates people is precisely the fact that I’m not interested in constructing a new schema or in validating one that already exists. Perhaps it’s because my objective isn’t to propose a global principle for analyzing society. And it’s here that my project has differed since the outset from that of the historians. They—rightly or wrongly, that’s another question—take “society” as the general horizon of their analysis, the instance relative to which they set out to situate this or that particular object (“society, economy, civilization,” as the *Annales* have it). My general theme isn’t society but the discourse of true and false, by which I mean the correlative formation of domains and objects and of the verifiable, falsifiable discourses that bear on them; and it’s not just their formation that interests me, but the effects in the real to which they are linked.

I realize I’m not being clear. I’ll take an example. It’s perfectly legitimate for the historian to ask whether sexual behaviors in a given period were supervised and controlled, and to ask which among them were heavily disapproved of. (It would of course be frivolous to suppose that one had explained a certain intensity of “repression” by the delaying of the age of marriage. Here one has scarcely even begun to outline a problem: why is it that the delay

in the age of marriage takes effect thus and not otherwise?) But the problem I pose myself is a quite different one: it's a matter of how the rendering of sexual behavior into discourse comes to be transformed, what types of jurisdiction and "veridiction" it's subject to, and how the constitutive elements are formed of the domain that comes—and only at a very late stage—to be termed "sexuality" are formed. Among the numerous effects the organization of this domain has undoubtedly had, one is that of having provided historians with a category so "self-evident" that they believe they can write a history of sexuality and its repression.

The history of the "objectification" of those elements historians consider as objectively given (if I dare put it thus: of the objectification of objectivities), this is the sort of sphere I would like to traverse. A "tangle," in sum, that is difficult to sort out. This, not the presence of some easily reproducible schema, is what doubtless troubles and irritates people. Of course, this is a problem of philosophy to which the historian is entitled to remain indifferent. But if I am posing it as a problem within historical analysis, I'm not demanding that history answer it. I would just like to find out what effects the question produces within historical knowledge. Paul Veyne saw this very clearly:³ it's a matter of the effect on historical knowledge of a nominalist critique itself arrived at by way of a historical analysis.

NOTES

- * Originally titled "Round Table of 20 May 1978," this interview was published in 1980. The French editors have condensed the questions posed to Foucault by various interlocutors into those of a "collective historian." We preserve their amendment. [eds.]
- 1 Foucault is referring to Bettelheim's studies of concentration camp survivors; see Bettelheim, *Individual and Mass Behavior in Extreme Situations* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943) and *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (New York: The Free Press), 1960. [eds.]
- 2 Jean Kanapa is a leading Marxist and director of *La Nouvelle Critique*.
- 3 Cf. "Foucault révolutionne l'histoire," in Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (2nd ed., Paris: Seuil, 1978).