REPLY TO SNJEŽANA PRIJIĆ SAMARŽIJA AND PETAR BOJANIĆ*

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ABSTRACT

Foucault's philosophy and history of science(s) offer contradictory suggestions. His history of science is erudite, challenging, interesting, uncovering new and rich analogies between various disciplines. But his philosophy of science fosters problematic extreme anti-realism combined with elements of strong relativism. The style is rich in ambiguous, even dark pronouncements, often sounding bombastic („end of man"). In the paper I develop the hypothesis that there are two opposing pressures coming all the way from the early structuralist model (and the structuralist tradition) which I sketch briefly. On the one hand, structuralist approach is good for suggesting organizational principles, on the other bad in excluding issues of truth, explanatory potential of theories, and even their empirical adequacy. It has proved quite poor in offering explanatory tools on meta-level. If the pressure of evidence is ‚not seen as the prime mover (or at least a crucially important mover) of scientific change, and if change has nothing to do with the search for more adequate picture then the seduction of the power-model, with its political potential, becomes very strong. It is ubiquitous in continental philosophy of 20th century. I am afraid that the two components of structuralist heritage have been yielding a very mixed result: bad philosophy of science disfiguring the history of science. The interesting and challenging material from the latter is used for very dubious generalizations in the former.

Keywords: *Foucault, truth-bracketing, episteme, structuralism*

First, my dear friends, I want to thank you for both publications on my work. The first, is the book Samaržija, Snježana & Petar Bojanić (eds.). 2012. *Nenad Miščević – sva lica filozofije.* (Nenad Miščević – all faces of philosophy). Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju. When I learned about the conference dedicated to my work, and the book, I could

not believe my luck, and I love the book. Next, for the present publication. I apologize humbly for my delaying with answers; it just happened, and I have no plausible explanation to offer; now it is finally there, and my heart is filled with gratitude. Let me mention Majda Trobok and Dunja Jutronić, two ladies who did all the pushing and pressing; had it not been for their effort, I would have probably never written my answers. Now to the kind text produced by Snježana and Petar.

First, I am impressed by the careful reading of my work, and a fine chronology and discussion of my views.[1] Second, since the text is focused on my reading of Foucault, I want to use the opportunity and in this answer try to fill the gap I left in my original text. There, I talk about several models present in Foucault, the pure knowledge-accumulating, the pure knowledge-subversive, and the optimistic, good knowledge preserving model, plus perhaps the va-et-vient, zigzagging. I concentrate on his books published in seventies and eighties. Here I want to look at the question of how this tension began, in his *Order Of Things* (OT) published originally in 1966 (I shall be quoting the translation from 1971, published by Pantheon Books, New York; the page numbers refer to this edition.)[2]

In the work Foucault did some history and some philosophy of science, focusing in particular upon modern linguistics, biology and economics, and arguing for the strong discontinuity between three or four periods: renaissance, age of classicism or „classical" age (as French call it), nineteenth century, and finally, present days (from the end of the First World War on).

Let me use at the example the history of biological 'knowledge'; two periods are at the center of the resarch, the "classical" biological 'knowledge' as opposed to the XIX c. biological 'knowledge'. Foucault offers a challenging reading of the former. Le us start with observation.

> Observation, from the seventeenth century onward, is a perceptible knowledge furnished with a series of systematically negative conditions. Hearsay is excluded, that goes without saying; but so are taste and smell, because their lack of certainty and their variability render impossible any analysis into distinct elements that could be universally acceptable. (132)

For him, observation exhibits complete dependence on epistemic structure (a more radical „kuhniansm" than the one due to Kuhn):

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[1] I am a bit at loss with the topic of my dissapointment(s) in continental philosophy: it appears in the sub-title but then ends up in a footnote, with missing references; the main source mentioned there as „Miščević (1989)" has dissapeared from references, so that I wasn't able to reconstruct the text they are referring to. I apologize for my disability.
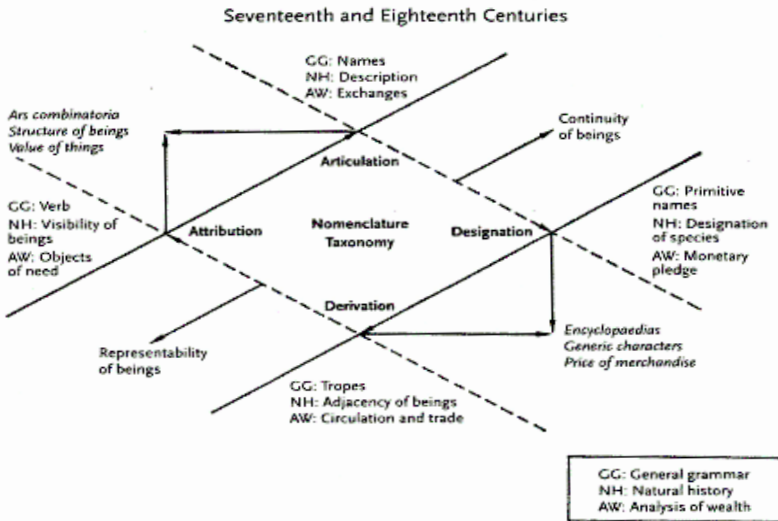
[2] James McAlistair's IUC Dubrovnik conference section on History of science as philosophy of science (2015) was for me the most important place where my reading of OT has been discussed; I thank James and all the participants.

> By limiting and filtering the visible, structure enables it to be transcribed into language. It permits the visibility of the animal or plant to pass over in its entirety into the discourse that receives it. (135)

Sometimes, he uses interesting stylistic devices. He quotes Linnaeus, in fine french:

> All the other species of the genus are compared with the first, all discordant notes being eliminated; finally, after this process, the character emerges'Le charactère se produit. (140)

In French, the phrase is ambiguous between "the character shows up" and "the character is being produced". Foucault leans to the later: the structure dictate the taxonomies. In this sense he is a structuralist, in spite of his reservations:[3] but there is more: parallel structure in language and study of wealth. Let me remind you of the scheme of the whole:

Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

GG: Names
NH: Description
AW: Exchanges

Ars combinatoria
Structure of beings
Value of things

Continuity of beings

Articulation

GG: Verb
NH: Visibility of beings
AW: Objects of need

Attribution   Nomenclature
Taxonomy   Designation

GG: Primitive names
NH: Designation of species
AW: Monetary pledge

Derivation

Representability of beings

Encyclopaedias
Generic characters
Price of merchandise

GG: Tropes
NH: Adjacency of beings
AW: Circulation and trade

GG: General grammar
NH: Natural history
AW: Analysis of wealth

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[3] Foucault writes:

> In France, certain half-witted 'commentators' persist in labelling me a 'structuralist'. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis.

> ...

> I should be grateful if a more serious public would free me from a connection that certainly does me honour, but that I have not deserved. There may well be certain similarities between the works of the structuralists and my own work. It would hardly behove me, of all people, to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today. But it is only too easy to avoid the trouble of analysing such work by giving it an admittedly impressive-sounding, but inaccurate, label. OT, Foreword to the English edition, xiii

All this brings us to his master metaphor, The Chinese Encyclopaedia:

> This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography - breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.
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> This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (1) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off" look like flies'. In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that. Preface xiv

So, classifications are problematic, not to say arbitrary. What about the referent, say life or plant? Well, there is no life in XVIII c., just living beings . Foucault criticizes:

> /…/ the application of categories that are strictly anachronistic in relation to this knowledge. Obviously, the most important of all these refers to life. Historians want to write histories of biology in the eighteenth century; but they do not realize that biology did not exist then, and that the pattern of knowledge that has been familiar to us for a hundred and fifty years is not valid for a previous period. And that, if biology was unknown, there was a very simple reason for it: that life itself did not exist. All that existed was living beings, which were viewed through a grid of knowledge constituted by natural history. (127)

Sounds like very strong constructivism, even like extreme nominalism: individuals are there, but their commonalities are not. Unfortunately, Foucault never worked it out. But we need a bit of discussion. The quote is ambiguous between:

a) life itself did not exist in the episteme (in the "grid of knowledge").

b) life itself did not exist in reality.

Oh, should we read it with a grain of salt, as in the option a), a sympatheric reader might suggest. (thanks, Marius Jakstas!).Yes, it appears less spectacular. But, why then did Foucault prefer the ambiguous formulation? Look at the most famous example:

> Man is an invention As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility -without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises - were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (387)

This brings us to the next important move, bracketing the issue of truth at the object level. Is Darwin's Theory closer to truth than Lamarck's or Cuvier's? Foucault refuses to answer. The same with other truth-related properties. is Linnès classification better than the earlier ones, does it cut nature more closely at its joints?

I submit that this epoche it is inherited from structuralism. De Saussure bracketed the reference, as irrelevant to linguisitcs, and other did the same for truth. Now, for the linguist, the issue of truth of object-language sentences of the language studied did not arise. If you do phonology or morphology, your objects have no truth conditions (taken in isolation). And of course, on the meta-level of your own theory, you expect it to be true.

When structuralism entered anthropology, it was with study of mythology. Lévi-Strauss found it fine that he is not demanded to decide whether myths are true or false; this would make his study less euro-centric and anti-racist. Again, the meta-level theory aims at truth.

	LINGUISTS	LÉVI-STRAUSS
DISCIPLINE	LINGUISTICS PHONOLOGY	ANTHROPO-LOGY
TRUTH STATUS OF THE OBJECT(s)	NEITHER TRUE NOR FALSE (MOSTLY)	FALSE (myths), but this can be put aside
TRUTH-STATUS OF THE THEORY (META-LEVEL)	TRUE	TRUE

Foucault continues the line, but his object are scientific theories, not myths. Still, he puts the issue of their truth in brackets, and concentrates on the structure.

	FOUCAULT
DISCIPLINE	HISTORY OF SCI,, & OF INSTITUTIONS & POWER
THE OBJECT OF STUDY	EPISTEME
TRUTH STATUS OF THE OBJECT	NOT-TRUE
TRUTH-STATUS OF THE THEORIY (META-LEVEL)	?????

In OT he is silent about the truth status of his own theory. This creates a problem: the truth of the theoretician's (meta-)discourse. Later, this will turn into ambiguity that I tried to explore in my paper targeted by Snježana&Petar.[4]

OT opens yet another problem. Call the shape of science in the given period „episteme", following Foucault's later terminology. Then, the task arises of explaining switches of epistemai. If adequacy, truth-likeness, and even observational adequacy are not relevant, why does some new episteme replace the old one? The problem is analogous to the issue of paradigm change(s) arising in the Kuhnian tradition. One option is just silence; the epistemai-paradigms are presented, and the issue of change is left open; this is a dominant feature of OT. The other is a kind of Heideggerian fatalism, and Foucault has been tempted by it. The option that he finally arrives at is the idea that paradigm changes are part of the history of power. Nietzsche comes in handy. Here, Foucault is inspired by his own earlier work on institutions: a power change can introduce new forms of thinking and he generalizes it in the spirit of Nietzsche: it is all history of power. Philosophy of science joins social epistemology:

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: …

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[4] Unfortunately, I here have to leave aside the literature discussing these issues in Foucault; in particular I am sorry for not having space to confront Garry Gutting's brilliant defense of Foucault in his 1989, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Cambridge University Press and his more recent publications.

> "Truth" is centered on forms of constraint. (Foucault's interview on Power/Knowledge, in Foucault Reader Paul Rabinow (ed.), (1984) Pantheon Books , p. 72

And he continues:

> "Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements . "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. ... Hence the importance of Nietzsche. *Foucault Reader* , p. 74-5 (FROM Power/Knowledge).

But what about his own discourse? The meta-level problem raises its ugly head here; some of the answers are explored in my Foucault paper discussed by Snježana&Petar. It joins the issues linked to epistemic structure: arbitrariness, the "construction" of reality for reference the dubious inheritance and the bracketing of object-level truth. All this had dire consequences for Foucault's history of science and his general social epistemology, if I may call it thus, following Snježana&Petar. Many agree that what he did was brilliant. Many admire him, the present speaker included. But this line of his work was not continued in the next generation. It stayed less popular than his more politicized work on prisons and mental hospitals. In fact, he moved from the OT to quite different stuff. There was a sliding into somewhat post-modernist ideology in his own work, and into a definitely post-modernist ideology in the work of his admirers in the next generation, the mine.

Foucault himself started this development, in decades following OT. Here is a brief map of the road to post-modernism:

> Foucault confronts the empiricist charter by arguing that history is never objective because it cannot be independent of the historian and his/her own time or cultural context, and it is the power of language to create meaning rather than to discover the true direction that history has taken that is important. As a result, to be honest to him/herself and his/her reader, the historian must avoid any claims to an empiricist-guaranteed disinterested objectivity located beyond the cultural frontier in which he/she lives.,

> The reasoning behind this position is Foucault's sustained attack on the reconstructionist belief in the adequate representation of reality through the narrative form. Not only is objectivity a myth, but more significantly we should recognise the sheer impossibility of the modernist theory of referentiality between word(s) and thing(s), statement(s) and evidence(s). Alun Munslow, (1997), *Deconstructing history,* Routledge, p. 123.

The sliding into post-modernism seems a bit shocking. Foucault's history of science(s) is erudite, challenging, interesting, uncovering new and rich analogies between various disciplins. But his philosophy of science fosters problematic extreme anti-realism with elements of strong relativism (pace Gutting). The style is rich in ambiguous, even dark pronouncements, often sounding bombastic („end of man"). Let me hypothesize that there are two opposing pressures coming all the way from the early structuralist model (and the structuralist tradition). On the one hand, structuralist approach is good for suggesting organizational principles, on the other bad in excluding issues of truth, explanatory potential of theories, and even their empirical adequacy. It has proved quite poor in offering explanatory tools on meta-level. If the pressure of evidence is not seen as the prime mover (or at least a crucially important mover) of scientific change, and if change has nothing to do with the search for more adequate picture then the seduction of the power-model, with its political potential, becomes very strong. It is ubiquitous in continental philosophy of 20th century. In a slightly mythical form it is very strong with Heidegger and Heideggerians, in a more sociological form with Frankfurt school all the way to Habermas and his followers, again, pluses vs. minuses. I am afraid that the two components of structuralist heritage have been yielding a very mixed result: bad philosophy of science disfiguring the history of science. The interesting and challenging material from the latter is used for very dubious generalizations in the former. This is the background of the events I discussed in my target paper, and the acceptance of a dual picture of Foucault's late work. There I claim that in Foucault's own writing, we find a dual framework of genealogy, accumulative and subversive. On the level of actually doing history, it is the historians-genealogists knowledge accumulation that reigns. Erudition, archive work and the keeping of the level of research are the slogans of the day, and here the accumulative model is central. He meticulously documents his claims with historical documentary material, trusting its credibility and (implicitly) even literary truth. There is in Foucault, as we have seen, a stark contrast between this confidence, search for truth and documents securing it on the one side and anti-realism about discourses studied on the other, I claim. His general pronouncements go in the direction of strong distrust: "every" discourse is infected with power, in fact more than infected, it is partly constituted by power. Truth should be put in scare-quotes: the so-called "truth" is the only thing we have, and this has later been developed as a purely knowledge-subversive deconstructive model. But then, Foucault sketches for us the third model, in which he calls the "good" intellectuals "erudites" , and openly admires their erudition, combining it with the "good" first-order work. The first, pure knowledge-subversive model, seems problematic, for old as for new knowledges, I claimed there. The opposite model, the knowledge-accumulative one, seems more fair and charitable to new knowledges. This brings us back to the square

one, to Snježana&Petar's text. I found their line slightly surprising. In the *Abstract* they write:

> In opposition to Miščević's dualistic view, we are more inclined to accept Goldman's characterization of Foucault's position as a revisionist project in the context of standard analytical epistemology that legitimately embraces even very serious expansions of epistemological themes. Finally, we propose that Miščević's dualistic interpretation reflects his general dualistic position concerning the previously described distinction between "continental" and "analytic" philosophy.

They reject the dual approach and decide for purely analytic option (I suppose that „in the context of standard analytical epistemology" refers to Goldman, and not to the immediately preceding "revisionist project".) In the conclusion of their paper they make their position clear.

> Even if Miščević was trying to be gentle in his characterization of Foucault by focusing on seeking to build bridges between the "old" and "new," it is still possible to criticize him for uncritically accepting the possibility of reconciliation as legitimate. It turns out that reconciliation is not possible even when social epistemology incorporates nearly all of so-called Foucault's topics, simply because the reconciliation of contradictory positions – where objective knowledge at once both exists and does not – is not possible (…).

I am a bit puzzled why they discuss the continental material at all, if they both feel such an antipathy to the project:

> Moreover, we are inclined to make an even stronger claim, according to which it would be necessary to develop a far more critical position towards epistemic consequences issuing from the "new" and "new-and-old" knowledge theses. Devaluing epistemic standards of knowledge, rationality and justification as mere convention without objective value leads to neglect of "old" virtues of epistemic responsibility, intellectual virtue and other epistemic desiderata. The "counter-knowledge" movement deconstructs all epistemic values under the guise of radical critique.

I would prefer to see the situation a bit differently: Foucault's position is "contradictory", as Snježana&Petar characterize it. But the contradiction comes from the presence of two opposite trends in Foucault, each of which is in itself relatively consistent. So, I was arguing for accepting one of the trends as far as it goes, not for accepting contradictions.

Let me illustrated. Foucault, following a long leftist tradition, hopes that the oppressed ones might have more correct social vision than the oppressors: a nurse sees the situation in the mental hospital better than its director. The intellectuals should pay attention to this seeing, and perhaps

even built upon it. (The trouble starts with the opposite trend in Foucault, namely denying any correctness to any view. But suppose we start with the positive trend.

Consider now the socially critical epistemologists, like Code and Miranda Fricker. Fricker talks about the victims of epistemic injustice. And she mentions "the sense of dissonance" which is, for her" the starting point for both the critical thinking and the moral-intellectual courage that rebellion requires". Fricker, M. 2007. Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing. Oxford: Oxford University , p. 168.[5]

So, she assumes that at least some of these victims perceive that there are victims, and do it sharper and better than co-workers in socially superior position. Of course, she could not possibly claim that discriminated persons are blind to their situation (and if she did, she would have to explain it in her work in quite a detail). But this is completely analogous to Foucault's good knowledge. Would the two of your really deny this? And why? But if you don't deny it, we are back to the fact of duality in Foucault's position.

And again, thank you for your kindness and for your kind engagement with my work!

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[5] Here is more about dissonance:
   the dissonance between received understanding and your own intimated sense of a given experience, it tends to knock your faith in your own ability to make sense of the world, or at least the relevant region of the world. Ibid. p. 163.