

This is not Foucault

In 2004 I talked with philosopher [Miroslav Marcelli](#) about legacy of Foucault and contemporary philosophy. Animation 'This is not Foucault', and film [Discontinuity](#) show Foucault's ideas. Finally I add a [dispute of evolution](#) becoming 'atheistic' religion.



Miro.Brada.2004

Identical things don't exist, not due to manufacture limit (Heisenberg's uncertainty) to produce EXACTLY same things, but because they have distinct positions, creation times. If probability of the first is $1/a$, probability of the next is $1/a^2$

Choses identiques ne existent pas, non pas parce que la limite de fabrication (l'incertitude de Heisenberg) pour produire EXACTEMENT les mêmes choses, mais parce que ils ont positions différente, autre moments de la création. Si la probabilité de la première est $1/a$, la probabilité de la prochaine est $1/a^2$

Foucault and freedom of identity

You participated in Foucault's lectures...

In 1981, I was attending Foucault's seminars at College de France. His topic - History of Sexuality, seemed irrelevant to my traditional academic orientation. Everything changed after his first lecture.

What persuaded you?

In his view the topic mattered to classic German philosophy. Foucault commented Kant's article 'What's Enlightenment?' occupied by the same question: who are we, heirs of Enlightenment, now?

How he presented it?

I witnessed thinking developing with all drama of unexpected continuations and reversals. It was not that kind of 'course' repeating year by year with the same conclusion. It was immediately clear, although this not big, bald man read the prepared text. It induced a need to oppose some of his views.

What exactly?

I doubted 'archeology of consciousness' excluding non-linguistic aspects. Later Foucault left it, and several times very changed his way of thinking. He did not avoid criticism of his previous views neither present his work as completed. I'd add to his later ideas about power, self-reflection because people subordinated to the power still decide. Foucault in one of his last interviews said he was exploring freedom in all of his work.

The French had a passion for philosophy. Could Foucault develop his ideas in Russia?

He was tied to the French society in a particular period, so it's difficult not only to imagine the Russian Foucault, but his appearance could be hardly repeated in France today. He was maybe the last one called «maître a pensée», master of thinking. It seems they don't need such masters nowadays. But his thinking isn't restricted to this historic situation. At the end of his life he thought to move to USA, where his work is still appreciated.

What would Foucault say about society now?

To speculate what Foucault would say is risky and paradoxical, as we'd have to empathize his thinking whose essence is not to empathize (in searching for answers) other thinking.

Being homosexual (died of HIV, 1984) what he thought of gay marriage, drugs, euthanasia?

He demanded the equal rights including right to suicide, but did not consider himself a representative - sort of homosexual thinking, and refused any tries to develop e.g. homosexual art. He rejected the restricted identity, which could be also the identity of gay relationship. He wanted drugs being part of experimenting with own identity, but didn't propagate indulgence, instead he assumed ethic resulting from a need being master of self.

Discontinuity and exclusion

Did Foucault's criticism of universal concepts deny differences (in charm, intellect, morality)?

Foucault does not deny differences, only questions conditions of their possibility. The differences transfer in our responses to judgements whose basis is however neither natural nor stable. It emerged in certain historical moment whose circumstances reveal interest to exclude those who differ.

Fools?

There were times when the higher truth notifying the future was revealed through a mouth of a fool. How happened, that since Enlightenment a fool had been classified as a folly and got into enclosed institution? This question lead to the Foucault's first great book: History of Madness (1961). He will ask such questions during whole of his life. Why is an idea once a deep knowledge, marked as a blunder?

Is historical, social, cultural, science evolution illusionary?

Foucault doubted the progress of Western society that should be guaranteed by acquired privileges as scientific advance, humanistic base of law, progressive education. He was not the first critique. Psychologist Jean Piaget noticed similarity between Foucault's The words and the things (1966) and Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962).

What was Foucault's contribution?

He particularized steps and processes of preconditions. Episteme, the principle of power structure, notifies in an indefinite form, and then transforms itself to theory. The norm to supervise and punish had only gradually resembled a prison or school. These motions don't need to be overlapped by a story of unstoppable progress of modern society.

What's a message of Foucault's book This is not a pipe with a pipe's image?

Foucault thought that Magritte's painting of a pipe entitled This is not a pipe, deviated from imitation that long dominated western art. Plato called such images - without predetermined pattern, simulacra and condemned their creators as producers of delusions. Simulacra can explain many phenomena of our contemporary visual culture.

According to Foucault, the power defines the "author" and its role, while the invention is secondary, irrelevant or an obstacle (e.g. Galileo). How was Foucault as an "author" defined?

Foucault challenged the idea of „author“, as a source of hidden abilities and inspirations. Likewise Russian formalists or art historian Wölfflin thought that creator's great secret was an illusion. So Foucault's position belongs here too.

What was Foucault's contribution?

He was dismantling this illusion being a challenge for a thorough historical analysis of assumptions. The author should be decomposed and reconstructed according to different social orders, by relevant archived texts. As we see the result of study in archives, we can see Foucault closer.

He - himself authority - viewed the authority a power tool. Isn't it a paradox?

Foucault taught us that history of thought of 19 century can be written without emphasis on the most recognized philosophers: Hegel, Marx. He didn't claim that power only represses us, and so we must release ourselves. He rejected the concept of punitive power, and understood its function to repress as well as create us. He just refused its innocent appearance. Power affects relation of teacher-student, which does not imply to remove the teacher. Understanding history of such relations transfers their character.

Why Bergson, Sartre, Foucault were so popular in France?

Although Bergson was in a bit different environment than Sartre and Foucault, all these and similar thinkers, could interest public thanks to a solid system of education (philosophy was important part of high school in France), journals, later radio and TV. Philosophy could take advantage of its close link with literature, when Bergson and Sartre got Nobel prizes. Not last, it was a tradition of the French scientists to reflect knowledge.

Communication is not knowledge

Focus on impractical (linguistic, historical) issues can't give clear answers. Could philosophy overcome it today?

Situation seems new, but philosophy deals with it from its beginning. Do you think that Athenians did not reproach Socrates impracticability? Or that Descartes did not know that people wanted final solutions?

Philosophy set us free from belief that radical beginning starts right now. There is its tendency to historicise. It does not escape from presence, only reminds its instability. Philosophy offers nothing to those who hide behind it to still life of definite answers, theses, doctrines.

Internet opened the new experimental space: chat, media, web applications, while philosophy seems lagged behind...

Computers and internet revolutionarily enhanced communication space, but communication is not knowledge - even though they expect each other. Radical increase of communication does not need to radically deepen knowledge. Is art on internet more valuable than art in theatres or exhibition halls?

Is it true also for philosophy?

Yes, but philosophy does not escape from internet. Its concepts contributed to understanding of internet and related changes. E.g. Barthes hardly anticipated internet, but his concept of text as a net, is beneficial. Or cyberspace theorist Mitchel uses deterritorialization - a notion elaborated by Gilles Deleuze.

Nietzsche inspired German leaders of WW I / II. Can philosophy prevent itself from the abuse?

Each idea, theory, book is exploitable, which can't be prevented by its replacement with simplified receipts or appeals. Philosophy justified some totalities, but at the same time it doubted them. Well known Marx's thesis says, philosophers till

now just interpreted the world, but it is about to change it. Some explained it that it should be changed according to their own needs. Philosophy offers only understanding, as an assumption for an action.

Evolution is true, if it is untrue

Evolution is, unlike religion, often presented as 'objective', 'scientific', 'atheistic'. But like religion, evolution justifies the power structure: 'those above' are (genetically) better adapted than 'those below', which intends to keep people obedient: amor fati. It is not so surprising that some religious people don't see a dispute between evolution and God (or bible). Personally I am not very interested in evolution (neither Big Bang) whether it is true or not. But couple of years ago I found out that evolution logic in itself was biased - regardless of mutations, natural selection, etc.



Evolution leads to this paradox: 2 people argue about evolution, one supports, another refutes. If evolution is universally true (anytime), the supporter MUST have an advantage over the refuter. The advantage results from better adaptability to environment (key criterion of natural selection). The truth (or what is truer) is closer to reality than untruth, i.e. the truth improves adaptation. Then the statement: 'evolution is true' is motivated by the 'evolutionary' advantage... So it is BIASED (if it is true). I.e. evolution is true, if it is untrue (then it may be unbiased)...

It resembles Wittgenstein's conclusion in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922): "*what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence*". I.e. evolution is true (unbiased), if we don't talk / know about it (then it may be unbiased)...

Also it corresponds to *Russell's paradox* (1901): "*Let R be the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. If R is not a member of itself, then its definition dictates that it must contain itself, and if it contains itself, then it contradicts its own definition as the set of all sets that are not members of themselves*". i.e. evolution (=set of all sets) is true (=contains itself) only if it is untrue (=if it does not contain itself)...

Evolution may be thought as statistics - i.e. it is valid on average, but momentary truth is unnecessary. But it can't be applied when evolution itself is discussed (if it is true or untrue). Otherwise it could imply: evolution is sometimes true sometimes untrue, which would mean evolution is untrue, as truth must be 100% true.

There have been cases when truth was / is disadvantage. E.g. was it evolution when Middle Age authorities burnt *Giordano Bruno* (1600)? Is war, economic crisis, nuclear waste, betrayal... evolution? Bruno, *Galileo* knew Earth circles Sun, not reverse. It was accurate unlike Middle Age dogmas, but it was disadvantage. Society (what majority obeys) is part of adaptability, although it may support lie or perversity. If the majority thinks (obeys) evolution is untrue, it is untrue, even it is true. If the majority thinks evolution is true, it is true, even it is untrue. Adaptability (key criterion of natural selection) depends so on the power being a sociological reason why evolution is impossible.

Another way to doubt evolution is its lack of intricacy, when its principle: natural selection (with mutations) according to adaptability is too simple. If the simple repeats, it can speculatively explain complicated thing. It is however uneasy to prove, and has limits, when the simple can hardly explain something too complex (brain, eye, engine).