



A category of bourgeois culture and morality rooted in modern humanist Enlightenment philosophy. Although the OED defines benevolence as a natural disposition, its examples betray a word whose history in language is inscribed by class and gender differences: "The poor and dependent exercise our active benevolence"; "Let the man give unto the wife due benevolence" (1988: 803). Postmodern critique of power and subject have approached benevolence in terms of the epistemological and moral-ideological production of an hegemonic humanist subject rather than a natural human disposition. For instance, turning punishment into a technology of reform is an apparently benevolent act, progress by humanism. However, delineating a connection between charity and confinement, Michel Foucault's work on modern discipline, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, demonstrated that reformist benevolence has an eye to political and economic profit that it extracts from disciplined and productive bodies. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction can also be read as a method of unmasking benevolent intention. Since deconstruction considers the subject as the effect of a textual network in the broadest sense, it offers to the subject the possibility of taking into account the structure of his/her own production and of reading his/her subjective investment in texts and narratives by drawing attention to their rhetorical nature and context (1976).

The most suggestive and persistent critique of benevolence in contemporary theoretical writing can be found in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critique of neo-colonialism. For Spivak, Western humanist benevolence is an essential, constitutive part of the system and problematic of neo-colonial hegemony. Bringing together Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics, feminist critique of phallogentrism and marxist critique of imperialism in works such as In Other Worlds, and The Post-Colonial Critic, Spivak argues that the benevolent subject's desire to do good and to promote the happiness of others involves "welcoming those others into his own understanding of the world, so that they too can be liberated and begin to inhabit a world that is the best of all possible worlds." (Spivak 1990: 19) U.S. President Truman's inaugural address in 1949 is a good example of what Spivak means by benevolent subjectivity. First describing the emergent decolonized Third World as "inadequate," "primitive," and "stagnant," Truman then suggests that "we make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life." (quoted in Escobar: 1995: 3) However, in the performance of such good intention, the norm remains the benevolent rationalist.

This benevolent humanist does not always need to be a representative of Western power. In neo-colonialism, secular bourgeois Third World governments might inscribe the tribal ethnic societies within their national borders by a similar rhetoric of benevolence. Brazilian government defines Amazonian tribals as "our Indians," "condemned to poverty and misery" because of their life style, and considers it its "duty to help them emancipate themselves from servitude ... to raise themselves to the dignity of Brazilian citizens, in order to participate fully in the development of national society and enjoy its benefits." (quoted in Clastres: 1994: 45) Thus an "integrationist" strategy, already implied in Foucault's criticism, can also be found in neo-colonial or governmental benevolence towards the subaltern populations in non-Western countries.

The postmodern critique of neo-colonialism reveals benevolence as a denial of difference and constitution of hegemonic subject. The production of Western sovereign self is disguised by other-ing the Third World disenfranchised as lacking appropriate agency. Thus, in benevolent discourse, difference is accepted and denied at the same time, that is to say, it is made into a natural hierarchy. This is why, for the postmodern critic of benevolent subjectivity, discourses on Third World poor or the tribal minorities are never far from being problematic. Such designations as "stagnant," "lacking" or "primitive" are not merely objective factual descriptions but often rhetorical displacements of global socio-economic determinations into cultural or geographical traits. Rather than representing or helping the subaltern, benevolent discourse performs the hegemony of the neo-colonial subject and constitutes his/her world as naturally superior. This blocks the possibility of talking with the subaltern.

Benevolent humanism is not simply a legitimating ideology in the service of economic interests inscribed elsewhere. IMF's and World Bank's aid and development programs are instances of benevolence as forms of extraction of economic value. As these are essential to the system of neo-colonial exploitation, the so-called benevolent subjectivity and morality are inevitably politico-economic inscriptions.

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