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May 17th, 9:00 AM - May 19th, 5:00 PM

Divided by Enlightenment: Habermas, Foucault and the Place of Rhetoric

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Let's begin with a fairly uncontroversial assertion: that contemporary theories of the social tend to gravitate towards one of two philosophical poles. One pole best characterized as Habermasian, the other as Foucaultian. This is in no way meant to underestimate the influence of other theorists, either contemporary or historic, or to diminish the impact of various theoretical waves, such as postcolonialism and globalization. Rather, I mean to suggest the way that the Foucault/Habermas debate continues to influence new theorists, many of whom choose to explicitly align themselves with one or the other perspective. This has been particularly true in my own field of rhetoric (Farrell 1993; McKerrow 1989).

We can only speculate how this theoretical rift might have developed had Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault been able to discuss together their respective projects. Indeed, such a discussion was proposed for November of 1984; although, the debate never took place due largely to Foucault's untimely death (see, Kelly 1994). That the debate never actually took place, of course, has not diminished interest in it. Indeed, its nonexistence has likely sparked much of the speculation.

The topic of the debate, apparently suggested by Foucault, was to be Kant's 1784 essay, *"Was ist Aufklärung*?" At first glance the topic seems an odd one, particularly if it was Foucault's suggestion. There is clearly a Kantian strain to Habermas, whose notion of discourse ethics is an effort to extend Kant's general sense of morality, albeit without reference to the metaphysical or a universal subjectivity (Habermas 1987). Foucault's relationship to Kant, on the other hand, is more complicated. Kant does make an appearance in Foucault's (1970) influential *The Order of Things* though his role is as one of the herald's of the centrality of the human subject, a centrality Foucault seemed at odds with during much of his career. And yet, by the end of Foucault's (1997a) life he, like Habermas, had embraced the general project of rehabilitating aspects of Kant. Although the nature of those embraces are undoubtedly quite different.

Given the title of my essay, it should be no surprise that I also intend to reconstruct the Foucault/Habermas debate. What I hope to contribute through this reconstruction is the identification of a central *stasis* point from which to consider their more global differences. The *stasis* point I propose is the notion of comprehensibility which, as I will argue presently, functions quite differently in the two respective theoretical frameworks. For Habermas, comprehensibility is a minimum level for any potential communication and, hence, the development of rational consensus, etc. For Foucault, comprehensibility becomes a critical target with the goal of rendering the readily comprehensible problematic.

Read from this *stasis* point, the Enlightenment becomes a reasonable topic for debate as each theorist rescues from Kant a set of assumptions that lend credence to their respective projects. In order to elaborate my reading, I will briefly rehearse Kant's (1997) influential 1784 article and sketch out Habermas and Foucault's respective projects in relation to it. Subsequently, I will propose the notion of comprehensibility as a crucial *stasis* point around

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which their differences might be considered. Finally, I will consider the implications of this reconstruction, particularly as they relate to contemporary theories of rhetoric.

"Have courage to use your own reason"

Kant calls this the motto of enlightenment in his 1784 article entitled *"Was ist Aufklärung?,"* solicited by the editors of *Berlinsche Monatschrift*. The essence of enlightenment, Kant contends, is "man's release from his self-incurred tutelage." Humanity has invoked numerous tutors, from the priest to the police officer to the physician, all of whom command unquestioning obedience to their instruction. Kant does not, let us be clear, suggest disobedience – indeed the political emphasis for his suggestion comes from Frederick's pronouncement "Argue as you will about what you will, only obey" – but he urges us to question and critique those rules which we obey.

Individual disobedience cannot work, as Kant reasons that individuals cannot release themselves from tutelage, at least not permanently. Only a public can achieve such a release. Through the public use of individual reason, a general climate can be created which can rehabilitate individuals who have become accustomed to tutelage. Thus, a distinction between the private/obedient individual and the public/questioning scholar becomes evident. An army officer, Kant explains, cannot rightfully disregard orders when operating as an officer. But, as a public scholar that same army officer has an obligation to openly raise concerns about military policies and procedures. Indeed, this line of reasoning leads Kant to suggest, counterintuitively, that enlightenment is more likely where there is less civil freedom, as the human mind is "provided with more room for each man to extend himself to his full capacity."

The dialectic tension between obedience and reason seems to play an integral part in Kant's notion of Enlightenment. Critique is not a means of revolt but, rather, a means of inquiring into the existing relations of obedience. Indeed, one might surmise from this reasoning that without relations of obedience there would be no place for the public use of reason. Were relations of obedience utterly removed, then the work of critique would be done; but, a world without critique would be a dangerous one. This line of reasoning seems evident in Kant's assertion that there can be no final, permanent enlightenment. Such a permanent set of relations would be, in Kant's assessment, "a crime against human nature."[p. 14]

Facing an era that had not yet achieved complete comfort with the public use of reason, Kant's age was not an enlightened age. Rather, Kant contends, it was an "age of enlightenment," the slow process by which reason becomes used in public towards the critique of relations of obedience and tutelage. Whether or not an "enlightened age" could exist is left unanswered and is a question worth pausing over, particularly given Kant's general pessimism about the prospects of the human condition (Williams 1999, 120). At one level, one can imagine a set of social relations wherein the use of reason would be a permanent fixture. At another level, one might question whether such a fixture would not itself foreclose some avenues of reason, thereby becoming itself a form of self-incurred tutelage. Would an "enlightened age" be tantamount to the kind of final, fixed state which Kant called a crime against human nature? Or could social relations be arranged in such a way as to create permanent structures for the use of reason?

Phrased this way, the question of an "enlightened age" or an "age of enlightenment" sets the stage for the central difference between Habermas and Foucault. For Habermas, the use of public reason, as defined in the pragmatics of communication, creates a structure within which an enlightened age might be achieved. For Foucault, the structures of reason are always already

implicated in the kind of tutelage against which the use of reason ought to be directed. As such, for Foucault (1997a, 133) there can be no enlightened age, only, as he put it, "a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty."

In the next two sections I will briefly sketch out the projects of these two philosphers in relation to the central question of "enlightened" versus "enlightenment."

Habermas

While Habermas has produced an impressive number of books and on a wide variety of topics, there is an equally impressive consistency at the heart of these studies: an effort to provide a legitimate ground for social reason. In this way, of course, Habermas (1987) is deeply indebted to Kant's enlightenment project; indeed, his collection of essays, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, is largely geared towards recovering the enlightenment from Hegel's critique of Kant.

Habermas's recovery effort is founded on his faith in intersubjectivity as it is manifested in communication. In its essence, Habermas (1979a, 1981) suggests that as we are capable of coming to an understanding of utterances, we are also capable of achieving consensus regarding the truth, truthfulness, and rightness of an idea or action, and, in turn, we are capable of forging social relations which give rise to such understanding and consensus. In this way, Habermas's project entails three interrelated levels: linguistic/intersubjective, philosophical/rational and, political/public.

Drawing from Austin and Searle's work on speech acts, Habermas (1979b, 196) begins with the assertion that "reaching understanding seems to be intrinsic to human language as its *telos*." Achieving understanding through communication is possible because any communicative utterance can be subjected to a set of universal validity claims. Habermas suggests four such universal validity claims, comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness. Thus, of any utterance we might ask whether it is comprehensible, whether it is true, whether it is sincere, and/or whether it is appropriate. Importantly, for Habermas it is not only that these claims can be made of any utterance but that in making such an utterance the speaker is offering to redeem these validity claims.

The notion of these universal validity claims, thus, moves beyond the achievement of linguistic understanding and becomes the basis of communicative interaction. To grasp the significance of this relational aspect it is useful to quote Habermas (1979a, 3) at length:

> Coming to an understanding is the process of bringing about an agreement on the
> presupposed basis of validity claims that can be mutually recognized. In everyday life
> we start from a background consensus pertaining to those interpretations taken for
> granted among participants. As soon as this consensus is shaken, and the presupposition
> that certain validity claims are satisfied (or could be vindicated) is suspended, the task of
> mutual interpretation is to achieve a new definition of the situation which all participants
> can share. If their attempt fails, communicative action cannot be continued.

These linguistic validity claims, central to achieving communication, are not based on a socially achieved consensus but, rather, provide a formal basis upon which consensus can be asserted, called into question, mutually interpreted, and utilized in subsequent communicative utterances. In essence, the capacity to call validity claims to be redeemed, provides a universal

basis for both the achievement of a consensual understanding and the questioning, or "shaking," of that consensus.

From the everyday act of redeeming the validity of utterances, Habermas returns to the broader philosophical project of establishing a basis for reason. Modernity, Habermas (1981) argues, has been unable to rescue itself from the subject-centered philosophical approaches of Descartes and Kant. Reason, based in some universal subjectivity, has become an untenable project and led to the more radical condemnation of theorists like Foucault who seek to undermine the authority of reason by presenting it with its radicalized "other." As developed, the project of Modernity has become caught between an untenable universal subjectivity and an unhelpful, poststructural historicity. This latter notion positions reason only within its specific historical/material conditions and provides no architectonic for seeking a reasonable life.

As an alternative, Habermas offers communicative rationality as uniquely advantageous to either the centrality of the universal subject or the tumultuousness of poststructural historicity. As a kind of middle path, communicative rationality neither re-centers the subject nor dismisses it; rather, reason is positioned in the intersubjective relations between subjects. Reason is, thus, not entirely grounded in subjectivity but in the communicative acts occurring between individuals. A second advantage Habermas proposes is that communicative rationality is neither entirely ahistorical nor entirely grounded in historical conditions; rather, acts of communication occur in specific historical settings while being grounded in universal validity claims – thus being both immanent and transcendent in the same utterance. Finally, as these universal validity claims provide both the basis for consensus and the means for their critique, communicative rationality is uniquely self-transforming, able to both provide for a mutually agreed upon utterance and to lay open that utterance to discussion and alteration.

Unlike either the universal subjectivity of Cartesian/Kantian modernity or the negative critique of poststructuralism, there are practical implications of communicative rationality. Indeed, this may be its most apparent advantage. Habermas's (1962, 1973) earliest works, studies of the bourgeois public sphere and the legitimation of political structures, bears out the social implications of communicative rationality. In the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century, Habermas finds a social structure capable of embodying, at least in concept, the basic tenets of working communication: access to all, bracketing of status distinctions, openness to rational debate, a tacit agreement to bow to the force of the better argument, etc. Here in the coffeehouses and salons of western Europe, Habermas finds a historical blueprint for a social and political structure organized around communicative rationality. In many ways, Habermas's (1994) subsequent work can be seen as an effort to revive this public sphere, to reassert it as a blueprint for contemporary democracy.

The centrality of the public sphere returns us to the question of an enlightened age. Might we consider Habermas's efforts to revive, or rehabilitate, the public sphere as an effort to a secure a social structure for the public use of reason and, thereby, secure an enlightened age? I believe the answer is yes and it suggests that Habermas has garnered from Kant a structural impulse, albeit one wedded to the intersubjective rather than subjective. As a way of prefacing my later argument, I would note here that such a structuring of the social would require, as a necessary though insufficient condition, an initial comprehension of the structure itself. In other words, before one can play the game of the public use of reason one must, at a minimum, understand the basic terms: public and reason. Without such an initial understanding, the

structure cannot, logically, facilitate the use of public reason. Comprehensibility, thus, is a crucial element.

Interestingly, the validity criterion of comprehensibility receives considerably less attention from Habermas than any of the other three criteria. At times Habermas suggests comprehensibility as primarily a grammatical/linguistic criterion. However, comprehension entails more than merely grammatical sensibility. In addition to comprehending the existence of structures of the public use of reason, participants must have some comprehension of the notion of validity itself and, further, some comprehension of "truth," "truthfulness," and "rightness." In this sense, the validity criterion of comprehensibility enjoys a fundamental place within the social structures of the public use of reason.

Foucault

In a way, Foucault is also fundamentally interested in the question of validity. His three major projects, knowledge, power, and ethics, each focused on how statements of truth or relations of power or subjectivities become validated within and by discourse. Where Foucault differs from Habermas is in his insistence on the historicity of such notions of validity. Indeed, if there is any universal in Foucault it is discontinuity – nothing is necessary and any given truth, social structure, or subjectivity is itself subject to the transformations of history.

Foucault's refusal to consider transcendent structures or norms has left him open to harsh criticism (see, Eagleton, 1990; Fraser, 1989; Habermas, 1987). And, given his refusal of the universal, his return to Kant late in his career is something of a puzzle. Habermas (1986, 108), for instance, reads in Foucault's later interest in Kant a desire to return to the enlightenment project and its quest for universal foundations. Such a dramatic reversal, however, seems unlikely. Rather, Foucault (1997a) continues to reject structural impulses toward the universal and instead takes from Kant a critical attitude; an attitude focused on the process of enlightenment and not a quest for the enlightened.

The genius of Kant's essay is not necessarily in its conception of the public use of reason, though this notion works its way through Foucault as well, but in its reflection on its own present. It is this reflection on the present, turning the present into a problem, that becomes the critical juncture between Foucault's work and Kant's notion of enlightenment. Or, to put this another way, the historical immanence of Kant's critique is more important than its transcendence.

In Kant's reflection on his present, Foucault (1997a, 49) finds a sense of "eventualization," a concern for the conditions in which relations of obedience become reasoned about and legitimated. Literally, the way that truths and social structures occur as events. It is precisely this concern for the interconnections of power, knowledge and ethics in such events that has been at the heart of Foucault's broader project. *"Was ist Aufklärung?"* is, in this sense, a precursor to Foucault's own archaeological and genealogical efforts, as it engages the conditions of the historical moment of the Enlightenment, seeking to learn the lessons of the present. This problematizing of the present represents the heart of Foucault's work as well.

Presenting the present as a problem is not merely an intellectual pursuit. For Foucault the critical attitude embodied in Kant's essay is essential to the possibility of thought, freedom and dissent. Before turning to these notions, it is useful to sketch out Foucault's vision of this enlightenment critical attitude.

The critical attitude of Enlightenment has three crucial components for Foucault (1997a, 124-127). First it is an attitude aimed at limits. For Foucault, the question of limits is present in Kant, but posed as "what limits [must] knowledge renounce transgressing" in pursuit of certain universal categories. This question, however, must be rephrased as it engages the contemporary age. The focus is no longer to find limits that should be obeyed, but rather, to find those limits which can be transgressed. As Foucault (1997a, 125) puts it,

> The point, in brief, is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression.

> This entails an obvious consequence: that criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying.

Pursuing limits is not merely an action of negative transgression, but also entails efforts at experimentation – to live as one has not previously lived. Foucault's sense of experimentation does not occur on broad social levels, in the sense of globalizing social movements, but is always aimed at the specificity of actual lived conditions. Crucial here is the modesty of his effort, especially when compared to efforts at restructuring the social along universal principles. Indeed, considering the first and second component of this critical attitude together, grand experimentation devoid of some universal formal structures would be unwise and quite dangerous.

The third component of this critical attitude is recognition of its own limitation. Given the contingent and specific nature of such an attitude, Foucault's criticism must embrace the perpetual nature of critique. As Foucault (1997a, 128) puts it, the limitations and contingency of critique means "we are always in the position of beginning again."

Foucault's concern is clearly with "an age of enlightenment," understood as a process by which the present is turned into a problem, rather than with "an enlightened age." Thus, where Habermas might be said to have rescued a structuralist impulse from Kant, Foucault can be said to have rescued an ontological impulse. Foucault finds in Kant's ambivalence towards obedience/disobedience – rendered clearly in his repetition of "argue as much as you will, about what you will, only obey" – an urgent need for reflection on the present. In Foucault's sense, the possibility of overthrowing the overarching "Obey," of bracketing or eliminating relations of power, is impossible. Despite the impossibility of such a grand moment of enlightened emancipation, Foucault does not yield to the hopelessness of passivity. Rather, the contingency introduced into the present by its innate historicity opens the possibility for specific, tactical intervention and transformation. But these transformations are possible and productive only when preceded by a kind of patient reflection on the present as a problem.

To clarify this point I would briefly summarize a reading of Foucault I have offered elsewhere (Phillips 1999, 2000). In this reading I suggest that the notion of limits and limit experiences is central to Foucault across the three projects of knowledge, power and ethics. The experience of such limits functions as a kind of displacement, a moment where the relations of power/knowledge/subjectivity unravel. One finds this notion as early as <u>The Archaeology of Knowledge</u> where Foucault (1972, 152) describes the limits of discourse as "spaces of dissension" and notes that these limit points are precisely the location where new discourses are generated and transformed.

The notion appears again when Foucault discusses the relationship between relations of power and critique. Here he argues that critique functions to reveal the "lines of fragility in the present" and create a "space of concrete freedom, i.e., of possible transformation" (1988, 36). These points of freedom occur at the moment before the reversal of power relations, at that uncertain moment before the status quo has been either reasserted or reformed. Critique, as a means of opening these spaces, creates an experience of paralyzing uncertainty, shutting the mouths of leaders and prophets who would offer new directions. For freedom to occur, Foucault implies, there must first be an experience of anxious uncertainty and it is the function of critique to foster such moments.

The free choice of new relations of action requires thought, initially an odd term within the writings of the philosopher who heralded the end of subjectivity. Thought, however, is a crucial experience for Foucault. "Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (1997a, 117). The experience of thought, in turn, requires the experience of limits. As he (1997b, 117) explains,

> Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it.

At this point the notion of comprehensibility becomes relevant to the connection between Foucault and Kant. The ontology of the present, as a problematization, requires a displacement of the present and those three sets of relations that bring us to the experience of the present: knowledge, power and subjectivity. Foucault (1997a, 32) captures the essence of this argument when, in discussing the relationship between Kant and critique, he states, "critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability." It is to this voluntary incomprehension that I now turn.

> "Men work themselves gradually out of barbarity if only intentional artifices are not made to hold them in it."

Comprehensibility, as I have been using it, encompasses more than merely grammatical understanding. In order to be a useful validity criterion for communication, comprehensibility must entail, at a minimum, the notion of validity itself. In other words, without some initial grasp of the idea that the truth, sincerity or rightness of an utterance can be redeemed, how that redemption might be accomplished and what such redemption signifies, the larger pragmatic fails.

At a minimum, unless we are aware that we are in a communicative situation, the process of redeeming an utterance is irrelevant. For instance, the subway announcement that the next stop is the 34th street station, while informative, is not open to requests for redeeming the validity claims. Further, there seems to be a degree of cultural uncertainty regarding the potential redemption of claims made in and by popular outlets like the news media. Indeed, a significant portion of Habermas's efforts seems to be to restore our cultural recognition of communicative situations; to return to a culture producing rather than culture consuming society. At the root of

these efforts, I will suggest, is a broader sense of comprehensibility, one that entails recognition of those social structures within which communication occurs.

Social structures, in turn, are deeply embedded in the background consensus from which and against which communication occurs. To successfully engage in the process of offering, redeeming and requesting the redemption of utterances, participants must have some comprehension of the existence of such a background consensus even if they are unaware of the contents of this consensus. In other words, for us to engage in the "shaking" of our background consensus, as a means of critiquing those assumptions, at a very minimum we must comprehend that there exists a set of culturally embedded assumptions which might be shaken. We must, in short, comprehend the potential objects of critique before engaging in such communicative negotiations. Further, participants must comprehend their place within this social structure through an empathy for the positions and needs of others (see, Rehg 1994).

The implication of this conception of comprehensibility returns us to the notion of the public sphere. Returning to this central exemplar of Habermas's writings, the need to revive an identifiable public sphere lies precisely in the broader sense of comprehension outlined above. Bereft of a social structure readily associated with the public use of reason, the potential of communicative rationality is limited. Indeed, at times Habermas (1994, 103) calls for the public to come to a degree of self-recognition and it is here that a broader sense of comprehensibility becomes most poignant.

Habermas's broader project of recovering communicative rationality as a means of both philosophical and political reform is founded on this initial state of comprehension. The ability to readily comprehend the situations, components and process of communication is fundamental – a necessary though insufficient condition for the use of reason. We must, therefore, begin with a world in which the processes and stakes of communication are at the least comprehensible to all, even though these may be comprehended differently by some participants. For Habermas, the ability of these communicative social structures to be self-transforming lies precisely in their ability to bring diverse views together and create a mutually agreed upon set of assumptions via the process of communicative rationality.

As a way of clarifying and substantiating this interpretation, let me return to a quotation from Habermas introduced earlier in this paper. In the quotation, Habermas notes that the process of coming to an understanding is based on "presupposed" recognition of validity claims. These claims are based, at least in part, on the everyday background consensus against which communication takes place. However, once these background assumptions are "shaken," a process of mutual interpretation must be accomplished; otherwise, communicative action cannot continue. To be sure, the background consensus must be periodically shaken lest the dynamics of public reason become stagnant. However, even in these moments of crisis, a minimum level of comprehension – of the process of communication, the structures of communication, and the goals of communication – must remain.

The contrast here between Habermas and Foucault is quite striking. Comprehensibility is the primary target of Foucault's critical writings. Comprehension is, in a way, the enemy of freedom/thought/dissent, providing easy actions, interpretations and explanations. Readily available options are, for Foucault, precisely the aspects of the present that are most dangerous as they prevent reflection on the present as a problem. Foucault's critical writings, thus, seek not merely to shake the current background consensus, but to problematize the very experience of

the present. Displacing the subject from its present is, in this sense, the ultimate moment of incomprehensibility and it is this incomprehension that Foucault seeks in order to facilitate reflection.

Foucault and Habermas should have debated Kant's 1784 essay because it is in their readings of this deceptively brief essay that their central difference becomes most evident. Kant provides Habermas with an imperative to seek social structures for the public use of reason. Only these social structures can provide the kind of civil, public freedom necessary for the open critique of institutions. Kant provides Foucault with a model of reflection on the present, a problematic ontology. In this problematization, Foucault finds the possibilities of freedom, thought and dissent; activities that can only occur in the uncertain, disorienting moments of reflection on the present. For Habermas, we must begin by establishing structures for the public use of reason; for Foucault, it is precisely these structures that pose the greatest danger to the use of reason.

> "[I]ndeed, if only freedom is granted, enlightenment is almost sure to follow."

If the Foucault/Habermas debate is read around the *stasis* point of comprehensibility, where does this position rhetoric? I believe rhetoric is best conceived as operating at exactly this middle point between Foucault and Habermas, at the point where comprehensibility and freedom operate. Freedom, as I've argued above, is crucially linked to the notion of comprehensibility. For Habermas, freedom lies in the ability of individuals to come to autonomous non-coerced decisions and is, at least in part, dependent upon the social structures, which enable such decisions. For Foucault, freedom lies outside these social structures in the moments of discontinuity and displacement. Rhetoric, I believe, is intimately involved in each aspect.

Pertinent to this involvement, Henry Johnstone, Jr. (1990) provides an excellent metaphor for rhetoric. Rhetoric, in Johnstone's conception, functions as both "wedge" and "bridge." Rhetoric serves as a wedge in the sense that it pries us loose from preconceived notions and as a bridge in its ability to suggest alternative notions. In this sense, then, rhetoric performs a dual gesture of unsettling the readily understood world and suggesting alternatives.

Conceived as a dual gesture, rhetoric lies in between Habermas and Foucault. As a method of inventing new lines of reasoning, rhetoric cannot be contained by the social structures within which it is employed. Indeed, rhetoric seems to operate best when it is aimed at reconfiguring the very arena into which it is given. Thus, rhetoric, as wedge, is precisely that art which serves to "shake" the foundations of consensus and render the readily apparent taken-for-granted problematic. And, yet, rhetoric does not serve only to unsettle the regular patterns of discourse. As an art of invention, rhetoric is integral to the establishment of new patterns of discourse, thus "bridging" its hearer into some new conception of the world. Rhetoric, I would suggest, is an art located in the question of comprehensibility.

Perhaps this is the reason that neither Foucault nor Habermas embraces rhetoric. For Foucault, rhetoric's involvement in instantiating new patterns of discourse makes it always suspect, though he does not reckon on rhetoric's capacity to perform dissension. For Habermas, rhetoric's strategic inclination proves too disruptive to the structure's of communication; though he does not reckon rhetoric's capacity to reestablish the grounds for agreement (on this point see, Doxtader 1991). Occupying this middle ground, the study of rhetoric has much to offer both Foucault and Habermas.

Of course, rhetoric also has much to gain from these theorists. One of the implications from my reading of their debate is that simply casting one against the other is far too simplistic. While my own sympathies lie primarily with Foucault, it is clear that dissent cannot exist without the relations of consent which provide both its impetus and materials (Phillips 1996). Rhetoric is essentially an art of contingency and uncertainty, but it is also an art of forging sense of commonality and stability, even if only temporarily.

In closing, the question of an enlightened age versus an age of enlightenment becomes central to rhetoric. From its middle position, rhetoric is involved in both, offering visions of the enlightened and posing the critical questions of enlightenment. It is precisely in the dialectic tension between the possibility of a permanent enlightened state and the realization that any such state must itself be the subject of critique that rhetoric is employed. In between the hope of an enlightened age and the slow work of enlightenment lies the patient, inevitable work of rhetoric.

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