What Is Critique?

Michel Foucault

Translated by Kevin Paul Geiman

I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for inviting me to this meeting of the society. If I am not mistaken, I spoke here almost ten years ago on the subject "What Is an Author?"[1]

I do not have a title for the question on which I would like to speak today. M. Gouhier was kind enough to say that this was because of my stay in Japan.[2] To tell the truth, that is an amiable mitigation of the truth. Indeed, until the last few days, I could hardly find a title; or rather I had been haunted by one that I would prefer not to use. You will see why: it would have been immodest of me.

The question I want to speak about, one that I have always wanted to speak about, is this: What is critique? It is necessary to try to retain several points about this project that do not cease to take shape, to persist, to be reborn on the frontiers of philosophy—quite close to it, quite against it, at its expense, in the direction of a philosophy yet to come, in the place perhaps of every possible philosophy. And it seems that between the lofty Kantian enterprise and the small polemico-professional activities that bear the name "critique," there was in the modern West (dating, roughly, from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century) a certain manner of thinking, of speaking, likewise of acting, and a certain relation to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, as well as a relation to society, to culture, to others, and all this one might name the "critical attitude." Of course, you will be surprised to hear that such a thing as a critical attitude exists, one that is specific to modern civilization, when there have been many critiques, polemics, and so forth, and when some of the Kantian problems no doubt

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have origins dating much further back than the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is equally surprising to see that I am trying to find a unity to this critique, even though it appears destined by nature, by function—I was going to say "by profession"—to dispersion, to dependence, to pure heteronomy. After all, critique only exists in relation with something other than itself: it is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know and that it will not be; it is a gaze on a domain that it wants very much to police and where it is incapable of laying down the law. All this makes it a function that is subordinated in relation to that which is positively constituted by philosophy, science, politics, morals, law, literature, and so forth. And at the same time, whatever might be the pleasures or the compensations accompanying this curious activity of critique, it seems that it not only bears with it regularly enough—indeed, almost always—a certain inflexibility in its appeals to utility but that it also is undergirded by a more general sort of imperative—more general still than that of warding off errors. There is something in critique that is related to virtue. And in a certain way, what I wanted to speak to you about was the critical attitude as virtue in general.

There are many ways to construct the history of this critical attitude. I would like simply to suggest this one to you, which is—I repeat—*one* possible path, among many others. I will propose the following variation: the Christian pastoral, or the Christian church insofar as it deployed an activity that was precisely and specifically pastoral, developed this idea—unique, I believe, and completely foreign to ancient culture—that every individual, whatever his age or his status, from the beginning to the end of his life and down to the very details of his actions, ought to be governed and ought to let himself be governed, that is to say, be directed toward his salvation, by someone to whom he is bound in a total, and at the same time meticulous and detailed, relation of obedience. And this operation of direction toward salvation in a relation of obedience to someone must be performed in a triple relation to truth: truth understood as dogma; truth also insofar as this direction implies a certain mode of particular and individualizing knowledge of individuals; and finally insofar as this direction is deployed as a reflective technique comprised of general rules, particular kinds of knowledge, precepts, methods of examination, of confessions, of interviews, and so forth. After all one must not forget that what for centuries in the Greek church was called *techné technôn* and in the Roman Catholic church *ars artium* was precisely the direction of conscience; this was the art of governing men. This art of governing, of course, remained for a long time tied to relatively limited practices, tied ultimately, even in medieval society, to monastic existence and practiced above all in relatively restricted spiritual groups. But I believe that from the fifteenth century and right before the Reformation, one can say that there was a veritable explosion of the art of govern-

ing men, an explosion understood in two senses. A displacement first in relation to its religious source—let us say, if you will, a laicization—an expansion into civil society of this theme of the art of governing men and the methods for doing it. And then, second, the reduction of this art of governing in its various domains: how to govern children, how to govern the poor and beggars, how to govern a family, a house, how to govern armies, how to govern different groups, cities, states, how to govern one's own body, how to govern one's own mind. *How to govern*: I believe that that was one of the fundamental questions of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. A fundamental question to which the multiplication of all the arts of governing—pedagogical art, political art, economic art, if you will—and of all the institutions of government, in the broad sense that the word government had at this time, responded.

Now this governmentalization, which seems to me characteristic enough of these societies of the European West in the sixteenth century, cannot be dissociated from the question "How not to be governed?" I do not mean by this that governmentalization would be opposed, in a kind of inverted contrary affirmation, to "We do not want to be governed, and we do not want to be governed *at all*." What I mean is that in the great anxiety surrounding the way to govern and in the inquiries into modes of governing, one detects a perpetual question, which would be: "How not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of these principles, in view of such objectives and by the means of such methods, not like that, not for that, not by them?" And if one really gives this simultaneous movement of governmentalization, of society and individuals, what I believe to have been its own historic insertion and fullness, it seems that one could identify in all this something close to what might be called the critical attitude. Against this, and like a counterpoint, or rather as at once partner and adversary of the arts of governing, as a way of suspecting them, of challenging them, of limiting them, of finding their right measure, of transforming them, of seeking to escape these arts of governing or, in any case, to displace them, as an essential reluctance, but also and in that way as a line of development of the arts of governing, there would have been something that would be born in Europe at this time, a kind of general cultural form, at once a moral and political attitude, a way of thinking, and so forth, and which I would simply call the art of not being governed, or the art of not being governed like that and at this price. And I would thus propose this general characterization as a rather preliminary definition of critique: the art of not being governed so much.

You will tell me that this definition is at once quite general, quite vague, quite fuzzy. But of course! Yet I still think that it allows me to locate several precise anchoring points for what I would like to call the critical attitude. Historical anchoring points, of course, which one could delineate in the following way:

1. First anchoring point: at a time when the governing of men was essentially a spiritual art or an essentially religious practice linked to the authority of a church, to the magisterium of Scripture, not wanting to be governed in that way was essentially seeking in Scripture a relationship other than the one that was linked to the operating function of God's teaching. To not want to be governed was a certain way of refusing, challenging, limiting (said as you like) the ecclesiastical magisterium. It was a return to Scripture, it was a question of what is authentic in Scripture, of what was actually written in Scripture, it was a question concerning the kind of truth Scripture tells, how to have access to this truth of Scripture in Scripture and perhaps despite what is written, until one arrives at the ultimately very simple question: Was Scripture true? In short, from Wycliffe to Pierre Bayle, I believe that critique was developed in an important, but of course not exclusive, part in relation to Scripture. Let us say that critique is historically biblical.

2. To not want to be governed—this is the second anchoring point—not wanting to be governed in this way is not to accept these laws because they are unjust, because they are antiquated, or because they hide an essential illegitimacy under the more or less threatening splendor given by their present-day sovereign. From this point of view, critique is thus, in the face of the government and the obedience it demands, to oppose universal and indefeasible rights to which every government—whatever it might be, whether it has to do with the monarch, the magistrate, the educator, or the father of the family—will have to submit. In short, this is where one finds the problem of natural law.

Natural law is certainly not an invention of the Renaissance, but from the sixteenth century on it took on a critical function, one it would always retain. To the question "How not to be governed?" it responds by saying: "What are the limits of the right to govern?" In fact, this is the place where critique is essentially juridical.

3. Finally, and I will note this very briefly, "not wanting to be governed" is, of course, not accepting as true what an authority tells you to be true, or at least it is not accepting it as true because an authority tells you that it is true. Rather, it is to accept it only if one thinks oneself that the reasons for accepting it are good. And this time, critique finds its anchoring point in the problem of certainty in the face of authority.

The Bible, right, science; writing, nature, the relation to self; the magisterium, the law, the authority of dogmatism. One sees how the game of governmentalization and critique, the one in relation to the other, gave rise to phenomena that are, I believe, cardinal in the history of Western culture, whether it is a matter of the development of the philological sciences, or the development of reflection, of juridical analysis, of methodological reflection. But above all, one sees that the focus of critique is essentially the

cluster of relations that bind the one to the other, or the one to the two others, power, truth, and the subject. And if governmentalization is really this movement concerned with subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth, I will say that critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility. The essential function of critique would be that of desubjectification in the game of what one could call, in a word, the politics of truth.

I am arrogant enough to think that this definition, despite the fact that it is at once empirical, approximate, and deliciously distant in relation to the history it surveys, differs little from the one Kant gave, not of critique, but precisely of something else. Ultimately, it is not very far from the definition he gave of *Aufklärung*. It is indeed telling that in his 1784 text on the question "What is Aufklärung?" he defined Aufklärung in relation to a certain state of immaturity in which humanity would be maintained, and maintained authoritatively. Second, he defined this immaturity, he characterized it by a certain incapacity in which humanity would be held, an incapacity to make use of its own understanding without something that would be precisely the direction of another, and he used the word *leiten* whose religious meaning is historically well defined. Third, I believe that it is characteristic that Kant defined this incapacity by a certain correlation between an authority that is exercised and that maintains humanity in this state of immaturity, a correlation between this excess of authority and something that he considers, which he calls a lack of decision and courage. And so this definition of Aufklärung will not be only a historical or speculative one; in this definition of Aufklärung there will be something that appears a bit ridiculous to call "preaching," but in this description of Aufklärung Kant issues an appeal to courage. We must not forget that this is a newspaper article. A study is yet to be done of the relationship of philosophy to journalism beginning with the end of the eighteenth century—unless it has been done, but I'm not sure about that. It is quite interesting to see at what moment philosophers intervene in newspapers in order to say something that is for them philosophically interesting and that, however, is inscribed in a certain relation to the public with the purpose of an appeal. And finally it is characteristic that in this text on the Aufklärung Kant gives as examples of the maintenance of mankind in immaturity, and consequently as examples of the points on which Aufklärung ought to lift this state of immaturity and turn men in some way into adults, precisely religion, law, and knowledge. What Kant described as Aufklärung is indeed what I tried earlier to describe as critique, as that critical attitude one sees appear as a specific attitude in the West from, I believe, what was histor-

ically the great process of the governmentalization of society. And in relation to this Aufklärung (whose motto, you know well and Kant recalls it, is "*Sapere Aude*," but not without another voice, that of Frederick II, saying in counterpoint, "Let them reason as much as they want as long as they obey"), in any case, in relation to this Aufklärung, how is Kant going to define critique? Or in any case, for I do not claim to grasp what the Kantian critical project was in all its philosophical rigor (I would not even attempt this before such an audience of philosophers, for I am not a philosopher myself, being barely critical), how could one situate *critique* itself in relation to this Aufklärung? If, properly speaking, Kant calls critique the critical movement that preceded Aufklärung, how is he going to situate what he himself means by critique? I would say, and it sounds completely puerile, that in relation to Aufklärung, critique for Kant will be that which says to knowledge: Do you really know how far you can know? Reason as much as you like, but do you really know how far you can reason without danger? Critique will say, in sum, that our freedom rides less on what we undertake with more or less courage than in the idea we ourselves have of our knowledge and its limits and that, consequently, instead of allowing another to say "obey," it is at this moment, when one will have made for oneself a sound idea of one's own knowledge, that one will be able to discover the principle of autonomy, and one will no longer hear the "obey"; or rather the "obey" will be founded on autonomy itself.

I am not trying to show the opposition that Kant would make between the analysis of Aufklärung and the critical project. It would be, I believe, easy to show that for Kant himself, this true courage of knowing that was invoked by Aufklärung, this same courage of knowing [*savoir*] consists in recognizing the limits of knowledge [*connaissance*]; and it would be easy to show that for him autonomy is far from being opposed to obedience to sovereigns. But it no less remains that Kant affixed the understanding of knowledge to critique in his enterprise of desubjectification in relation to the game of power and truth, as a primordial task, as a prolegomena to any present and future Aufklärung.

I would not want to dwell further on the implications of this kind of slippage between Aufklärung and critique that Kant wanted to denote. I would simply insist on the historical aspect of the problem that is suggested to us by what happened in the nineteenth century. The history of the nineteenth century has laid itself open to the continuation of the kind of criticism—which Kant had placed somewhat in the background in relation to Aufklärung—with regard to something like Aufklärung itself. Or to phrase it another way, the history of the nineteenth century—and of course, the history of the twentieth century even more—seemed, if not obligated to decide in favor of Kant, at least to give substance to this new critical attitude, to this

critical attitude hovering in the background of Aufklärung which Kant had foreseen as a possibility.

This historical foothold that seemed to be offered to Kantian critique much more than to the courage of the Aufklärung consisted quite simply of these three fundamental traits: first, a positivist science, that is, a science fundamentally having confidence in itself, even as it found itself carefully criticized with regard to each of its results; second, the development of a state or a state system that, on the one hand, presented itself as the profound reason and rationality of history and that, on the other, chose as instruments procedures of rationalizing the economy and society; whence the third trait, in the style of this scientific positivism and the development of states, a science of a state or a statism, if you will. A whole fabric of tight relations is woven between them insofar as science will play an increasingly determinate role in the development of productive forces; insofar as, on the other hand, the powers of a statist type will be exercised more and more across sophisticated technical ensembles. From there, the question of 1784, "What is Aufklärung?"—or rather the way in which Kant tried to situate his critical enterprise in relation to this question and to the answer he gave—this interrogation of the relations between Aufklärung and critique will legitimately take the demeanor of a distrustful, or in any case, of a more and more suspicious interrogation: for what excess of power, for what governmentalization (all the more ineluctable as it is justified in reason) is this reason itself historically responsible?

Now this question, I believe, did not turn out entirely the same in Germany and in France, for historical reasons that would be necessary to analyze because they are complex.

One could put it roughly this way: less perhaps because of the recent development of a completely new and rational state in Germany than because of a very old attachment of the universities to *Wissenschaft* and to administrative and state structures, this suspicion that there is something in rationalization and perhaps even in reason itself that is responsible for the excess of power, well, it seems to me that this suspicion was especially developed in Germany and let us say in order to cut this still shorter, that it was especially developed in what one could call a German Left. In any case, from the Hegelian Left to the Frankfurt School there was a whole critique of positivism, of objectivism, of rationalization, of techné and of technicization, a whole critique of the relations between the fundamental project of science and of technique that has as its objective making apparent the ties between a naive presumption of science, on the one hand, and the forms of domination proper to the form of contemporary society, on the other. To take as an example one who no doubt was most distanced from what one could call a critique of the Left, it must not be forgotten that in 1936 Husserl ascribed the contemporary crisis of European humanity to something

where the question of the relations of knowledge to technique, of *epistemé* to *techné*, was at stake.

In France, the conditions of the exercise of philosophy and of political reflection were quite different, and because of that the critique of presumptuous reason and its specific effects of power do not seem to have been carried out in the same way. And it would be, I think, from within a certain thought of the Right during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that one would find this same historical accusation of reason or of rationalization in the name of the effects of power it carries with it. In any case the bloc constituted by the Lumières and the Revolution no doubt hindered in a general way this relation of rationalization and power from being really and profoundly called into question. Perhaps, too, the fact that the Reformation—which I believe to have been, in its very profound roots, the first critical movement in the way of the art of not being governed—did not have in France the fullness and success it knew in Germany no doubt meant that in France this notion of Aufklärung with all the problems it posed did not have as great a significance, and besides it never took hold of a historical reference with as long a range as in Germany. Let us say that in France one was content with a certain political valorization of the eighteenth-century philosophes, at the same time as one downplayed the thought of the Lumières as a minor episode in the history of philosophy. In Germany, on the contrary, that which was understood by Aufklärung was considered, for better or worse, less important, but it was certainly considered an important episode, a kind of vivid manifestation of the profound destiny of Western reason. In the Aufklärung and in this whole period—which, in short, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century serves as a reference for this notion of Aufklärung—one tried to decipher, to recognize the most prominent line of ascent of Western reason, while it was the politics to which it was tied that became the object of a distrustful examination. Such is, if you will, roughly, the chiasm that characterizes the way in which the problem of Aufklärung was posed during the nineteenth and the whole first half of the twentieth century in France and in Germany.

Now I believe that the situation in France has changed in the course of the last few years. In fact, it seems to me that in France we have come to a time when precisely this problem of Aufklärung (which had been so important for German thought since Mendelssohn, Kant, passing through Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, the Frankfurt School, etc.) can be taken up again in a meaningful enough proximity with, let us say, the works of the Frankfurt School. Let us say, I am again being brief, that—and this is not surprising—it is from phenomenology and the problems it raised that the question "What is Aufklärung?" returned to us. It returned to us, in effect, through the question of meaning [*sens*] and of what can constitute meaning. How does meaning arise from nonmeaning [*nonsens*]? How does meaning come to

be? One really sees that this question is the complementary of this other one: How is it that the great movement of rationalization led us to so much noise, so much rage, so much silence and dismal mechanism? After all, it must not be forgotten that Sartre's *Nausea* is the contemporary within a few months of Husserl's *Crisis*. And it is through the postwar analysis of this, namely, that meaning is only constituted by systems of constraints characteristic of the signifying machinery, it is, it seems to me, through the analysis of this fact that there is meaning only through effects of coercion proper to structures, that—by a strange shortcut—the problem between *ratio* and *power* was recovered. I think too (and, no doubt, a study should be done of this) that the analyses of the history of the sciences, this whole problematization of the history of the sciences (which, also, is no doubt rooted in phenomenology, whose history in France followed an altogether different path, moving through Cavaillès, Bachelard, to Georges Canguilhem), it seems to me that the historical problem of the historicity of the sciences has some relations and analogies, echoes up to a certain point, with this problem of the constitution of meaning: How is this rationality born, how is it formed, from something that is wholly other? Here is the reciprocal and the inverse of the problem of Aufklärung: How is it that rationalization leads to the rage of power?

Now it seems that either this research on the constitution of meaning with the discovery that meaning is only constituted by the coercive structures of the signifier or the analysis made in the history of scientific rationality with the effects of constraint linked to its institutionalization and to the construction of models, all these historical researches, it seems to me, have only affirmed in a small way and, as it were, through an academic loophole, what was after all the basic movement of our history for the last century. For, by dint of our story that our social or economic organization lacked rationality, we found ourselves before—and I do not know if it is too much or not enough reason—in any case surely before too much power, by dint of hearing ourselves singing the promises of revolution—and I do not know if where revolution did occur it is good or bad—but we found ourselves before the inertia of a power that maintained itself indefinitely; and by dint of hearing ourselves singing of the opposition between the ideologies of violence and the veritable scientific theory of society, of the proletariat and of history, we found ourselves with two forms of power that resembled one another like two brothers: Fascism and Stalinism. Thus the return of the question "What is Aufklärung?" And in this way the series of problems that had distinguished Max Weber's analyses is reactivated: What is it about this rationalization that one agrees characterizes not only Western thought and science since the sixteenth century but also social relations, state organizations, economic practices, and perhaps even the behavior of individuals? What is it about this rationalization in its effects of constraint and perhaps

of obfuscation, of a massive and growing and never radically contested implantation of a vast scientific and technical system?

The problem of "What is Aufklärung?" which we are truly obliged in France to take on our shoulders again can be approached by different paths. And I am absolutely not retracing the path by which I would like to approach it—and I would like for you to believe me—in a polemical or critical spirit: two reasons why I am seeking nothing other than to mark differences and in some way to see how far one can multiply, reduce, demarcate some in relation to the others, to dislocate, if you will, the forms of analyses of this problem of Aufklärung, which is perhaps after all the problem of modern philosophy.

I would like right away to note, in approaching this problem which makes us brothers with the Frankfurt School, that to make Aufklärung the central question at once means a number of things. It means first of all that one is engaged in a practice that one could call historicophilosophical, which is nothing like the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy, a certain historicophilosophical practice, and by that I mean that the domain of experience to which this philosophical labor refers does not absolutely exclude any other. This is not interior experience, these are not the fundamental structures of scientific knowledge, but neither is this an ensemble of historical contents elaborated elsewhere, prepared by the historians and received ready-made as facts. In fact, in this historicophilosophical practice it is a matter of making one's own history, of fabricating as through fiction the history that would be traversed by the question of the relations between the structures of rationality that articulate the true discourse and the mechanisms of subjugation that are tied to it. One really sees that this question displaces the historical objects that are habitual and familiar to the historians in the direction of the problems of the subject and of truth with which historians are not concerned. One sees too that this question puts philosophical labor, philosophical thought, philosophical analysis into empirical contents sketched out precisely by it. Thus, if you will, before this historical or philosophical labor, historians are going to say "Yes, yes, of course, perhaps," in any case this is never completely like that, which is the effect of the confusion due to this displacement toward the subject and the truth of which I spoke. And the philosophers, even if they don't get their feathers ruffled, generally think, "Philosophy, despite everything, is something else altogether," this being due to the effect of the fall, due to this return to an empiricity that is not even guaranteed by an interior experience.

On the one hand, let us grant these voices all the importance they have, and this importance is great. They indicate at least negatively that one is on the right track, that is, that across the historical contents one elaborates and to which one is tied because they are true or because they count as true,

one asks the question: What am I then, I who belong to this humanity, perhaps to this fringe, to this moment, to this instant of humanity that is subjected to the power of truth in general and of truths in particular? To desubjectify the philosophical question by referring to its historical content, to liberate the historical contents questioning the effects of power from this truth which they are supposed to restore, this is, if you will, the first characteristic of this historicophilosophical practice. On the other hand, this historicophilosophical practice evidently finds itself in a privileged relation to a certain empirically determinable epoch: even if it is relatively and necessarily fuzzy, this epoch is, of course, designated as a moment in the formation of modern humanity, "Aufklärung" in the broad sense of the term to which Kant, Weber, and so forth, referred, a period without a fixed date, with multiple entries because one can define it just as well by the formation of capitalism, the constitution of the bourgeois world, the establishment of the state system, the foundation of modern science with all its correlative techniques, the organization of an opposition between the art of being governed and that of not being governed in such a manner. The relationship of historicophilosophical labor to this period is privileged because it is there that these relations among power, truth, and the subject that it is concerned with analyzing appear in some way, raw and at the surface of visible transformations. But it is privileged too in the sense that it forms from there a matrix for the course of a whole series of other possible domains. Let us say, if you will, that it is not because one privileges the eighteenth century, because one is interested in it, that one encounters the problem of Aufklärung; I would say that it is because one wants to pose fundamentally the problem "What is Aufklärung?" that one encounters the historical scheme of our modernity. It will not be a matter of saying that the fifth-century Greeks are a little like eighteenth-century philosophers or that the twelfth century was already a kind of Renaissance, but rather of trying to see under what conditions, at the price of what modifications or what generalizations, one can apply to any moment of history this question of Aufklärung, the relationship of power, truth, and the subject.

Such is the general framework of this research that I would call historicophilosophical, and here is how one can now carry it out.

I said earlier that I wanted in any case to trace very vaguely other possible paths than those that seem to me until now to have been the most readily trodden. This is in no way to accuse them of leading nowhere or of bearing no valid result. I wanted simply to say and to suggest this: it seems to me that this question of Aufklärung since Kant, because of Kant, and likely because of the slippage between Aufklärung and critique that he introduced, was essentially posed in terms of knowledge, that is to say, in departing from what was the historic destiny of knowledge at the moment of the con-

stitution of modern science; that is also to say, in seeking in this destiny what already marked the undetermined effects of power to which it would necessarily be linked by objectivism, positivism, technology, and so forth, by referring this knowledge to the conditions of constitution and of legitimacy of all possible knowledge, and finally, in seeking how the passage outside of legitimacy had taken place (illusion, error, oversight, recovery, etc.). In a word, it is the procedure of analysis that seems to me at bottom to have been engaged by the slippage of critique in relation to Aufklärung effected by Kant. It seems to me that from there, one has a procedure of analysis that is at bottom that which was followed most often, a procedure of analysis one could call an inquiry into the legitimacy of the historical modes of knowing. It is in any case in this way that a certain number of philosophers of the eighteenth century, it is in this way that Dilthey, Habermas, and so forth, understood it. More simply still: what false idea did knowledge make of itself, and to what excessive use was it found exposed, to what domination consequently was it found tied?

Well, rather than this procedure, which takes the form of an inquiry into the legitimacy of historical modes of knowing, one could perhaps envision a different procedure. It could take as an entry into the question of Aufklärung, not the problem of knowledge, but that of power, it would proceed, not as an inquiry into legitimacy, but as something I would call a test of eventialization [*événementialisation*]. Pardon the horror of the word! And, quickly, what does it mean? What I would mean by procedure of eventialization, may the historians cry horror, would be this: first to take ensembles of elements where one can detect in a first approximation, thus in a completely empirical and provisional way, connections between mechanisms of coercion and contents of knowledge—diverse mechanisms of coercion, perhaps even legislative ensembles, regulations, material devices, phenomena of authority, and so on; contents of knowledge that one will take equally in their diversity and in their heterogeneity, and which one will retain in function of the effects of power of which they are bearers in that they are valid as making part of a system of knowledge. What one seeks then is not to know what is true or false, justified or not justified, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive. One seeks to know what are the ties, what are the connections that can be marked between mechanisms of coercion and elements of knowledge, what games of dismissal and support are developed from the one to the others, what it is that enables some element of knowledge to take up effects of power assigned in a similar system to a true or probable or uncertain or false element, and what it is that enables some process of coercion to acquire the form and the justifications proper to a rational, calculated, technically efficient, and so forth, element.

Hence, at this first level, not to work out the distribution of legitimacy, not to fix the point of error and illusion.

And it is why, at this level, it seems to me that one can use two words that do not have the function of designating entities, forces, or such things as transcendentals, but only of effecting, in relation to the domains to which they refer, a systematic reduction of value: let us call it a neutralization of the effects of legitimacy and an illumination of what, at a given moment, makes them acceptable and which allows for their actual acceptance. Thus, the word *knowledge* [*savoir*] is used to refer to all the procedures and all the effects of knowledge [*connaissance*] that are acceptable at a given moment and in a defined domain; and second, the term "power" does nothing other than cover a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, that seem capable of inducing behaviors or discourses. One sees immediately that these two terms only have a methodological role: it is not a matter of locating across them general principles of reality, but of fixing in some way the frontier of the analysis, the type of element that ought to be pertinent for it. It is a matter in this way of avoiding triggering the entrance of the perspective of legitimation as the terms "knowledge" [*connaissance*] or "domination" do. It is also a matter, at every moment of the analysis, of being able to give them a determinate and precise content, some element of knowledge, some mechanism of power; one ought never consider that there exists *a* knowledge or *a* power, still worse *the* knowledge or *the* power that would be in themselves operative. Knowledge, power, this is only a grid of analysis. One sees also that this grid is not composed of two categories of elements foreign to one another, those of knowledge on one side and those of power on the other—and what I said about them earlier made them exterior to one another. For nothing can appear as an element of knowledge if, on the one hand, it does not conform to an ensemble of rules and constraints characteristic, for example, of some kind of scientific discourse in a given epoch, and if, on the other, it is not endowed with effects of coercion or simply incitation proper to what is valid as scientific or simply rational or simply commonly received, and so on. Inversely, nothing can function as a mechanism of power if it is not exerted according to procedures, instruments, means, or objectives that can be valid in more or less coherent systems of knowledge. Thus it is not a matter of describing what knowledge is and what power is and how the one would repress the other or how the other would abuse the one, but rather it is a matter of describing a nexus of knowledge-power that allows one to grasp what constitutes a system's acceptability, be it the system of mental illness, of punishment, of delinquency, of sexuality, and so on.

In short, it seems to me that the path from the empirical observability for us of an ensemble to its historical acceptability, to the very epoch when it is effectively observable, passes through an analysis of the knowledge-power nexus that supports it, grasps it from the fact that it is accepted, in the direction of what makes it acceptable not, of course, in general, but solely

where it is accepted: this is what one could characterize as grasping it in its positivity. Thus one has there a kind of procedure, which, beyond the concerns of legitimation and consequently moving away from the fundamental point of view of law, runs the cycle of positivity in moving from the fact of the acceptance to the system of acceptability analyzed on the basis of the knowledge-power game. Let us say that this approximates the level of archaeology.

Second, one sees immediately that from this type of analysis a certain number of dangers threaten, which can only appear as the negative and costly consequences of similar analysis.

These positivities are ensembles that are not self-evident in the sense that whatever may be the habit or the usage that rendered them familiar to us, whatever may be the blinding force of the mechanisms of power that they put into play or whatever may be the justifications they elaborated, they were not made acceptable by some originary right; and that which it is a matter of making stand out in order to grasp what could make them acceptable is precisely that which is not self-evident, it was inscribed in no a priori, it was contained in no anterior condition. Bringing out the conditions of acceptability of a system and following the lines of rupture that mark its emergence are two correlative operations. It was not at all a matter of course that madness and mental illness be superimposed in the institutional and scientific system of psychiatry; it was no more a matter of course that the punitive processes, imprisonment and the discipline of the penitentiary, came to be articulated in a penal system; it was no more a matter of course that desire, concupiscence, the sexual behavior of individuals ought effectively be articulated by one another in a system of knowledge and normalcy called sexuality. The locating of the acceptability of a system is inseparable from the locating of what made it difficult to accept: its arbitrariness in terms of knowledge, its violence in terms of power, in short, its energy. Thus the necessity of occupying oneself with this structure in order to better follow its artifices.

The second consequence, also costly and negative, is that these ensembles are not analyzed as universals to which history, with its particular circumstances, would bring a certain number of modifications. Of course, many accepted elements, many conditions of acceptability, can have a long career behind them; but what is a matter of grasping in the analysis of these positivities is that they are in some way pure singularities, not the incarnation of an essence, not the individualization of a species: singularity as madness in the modern Western world, singularity absolute as sexuality, singularity absolute as the juridic-moral system of our punishments.

No founding recourse, no escape into a pure form—that is no doubt one of the most important and most contestable points of this historicophilosophical approach: if it does not want to fall either into a philosophy of

history or into a historical analysis, it ought to maintain itself in the field of immanence of pure singularities. What then? Rupture, discontinuity, singularity, pure description, immobile tableau, no explanation, no passage, you know all that. It will be said that the analysis of these positivities is not elevated to those procedures called explanatory to which one ascribes a causal value on three conditions: (1) one only grants causal value to the explanations that aim at a last instance valued as profound and unique, economy for some, demography for others; (2) one only grants as having causal value that which obeys a principle of pyramidization pointing toward the cause or the causal source, the unitary origin; and finally (3) one only grants causal value to that which establishes a certain inevitability or at least that which approaches necessity. The analysis of positivities, to the extent that it has to do with pure singularities related not to a species or an essence but to simple conditions of acceptability, supposes the deployment of a causal network that is at once complex and tight, but no doubt of another type, a causal network that would not obey precisely the requirement of saturation by a profound, unitary, pyramidalizing, and necessitating principle. It is a matter of establishing a network that takes account of this singularity as an effect: hence the necessity of the multiplicity of relations, of the differentiation between the different types of relations, of the differentiation between the different forms of necessity of the linkages, of deciphering interactions and circular actions, and of taking into account the intersection of heterogeneous processes. And hence nothing is more foreign to such an analysis than the rejection of causality. But what is important is that it is not a matter in such analyses of reducing an ensemble of derived phenomena to one cause, but of making intelligible a singular positivity in that which is precisely singular.

Let us say roughly that in opposition to a genesis that orients itself toward the unity of a weighty principal cause of a multiple descent, we are concerned here with a *genealogy*, that is, of something that tries to restore the conditions of appearance of a singularity from multiple determining elements, of which it would appear, not as the product, but as the effect. Thus this singularity is made intelligible, but it is not seen as functioning according to a principle of closure. We are not concerned here with a principle of closure for a number of reasons.

The first is that the relations that allow one to take account of this singular effect are, if not in their totality, at least in a considerable part, relations of interactions between individuals or groups, that is, that they imply subjects, types of behaviors, decisions, choices: it is not in the nature of things that one could find the backing, the support of this network of intelligible relations; it is the logic proper to a game of interactions with its always variable margins of noncertitude.

No closure either, because the relations that one tries to establish in

order to account for a singularity as effect, this network of relations, ought not constitute a unique plan. These are relations that are perpetually being undone in relation to one another. The logic of interactions at a given level plays between individuals, being able at once to guard its rules and its specificity, its singular effects, all the while constituting interactions with other elements that run at another level in such a way that, in a certain fashion, none of these interactions appears primary or absolutely totalizing. Each one can be replaced in a game that extends beyond it; and inversely none, as local as it may be, is without effect or without risk of effect on that of which it is a part and which envelops it. Thus, if you will and schematically, there is a perpetual mobility, an essential fragility, or rather an intermingling, between that which accompanies the same process and that which transforms it. In short, it would be a matter here of deriving a whole mode of analyses that could be called *strategic.*

In speaking of archaeology, strategy, and genealogy, I am not thinking that it is a matter of marking the three successive levels that would be developed on the basis of one another, but rather of characterizing three necessarily simultaneous dimensions of the same analysis, three dimensions that would allow in their very simultaneity the grasping of what is positive, that is, what the conditions are which make acceptable a singularity whose intelligibility is established by marking the interactions and strategies in which it is integrated. Such research takes into account... [several sentences are missing because of the turning over of the cassette]... is produced as effect, and finally eventialization in that one has to deal with something whose stability, whose rooting, whose foundation is never such that one cannot in one way or another, if not think its disappearance, at least mark that through which and that from which its disappearance is possible.

I said earlier that, rather than pose the problem in terms of knowledge [*connaissance*] and legitimation, it was a matter of approaching indirectly the question of power and eventialization. But you see, it is not a matter of making power understood as domination or mastery by way of a fundamental given, a unique principle of explanation, or of a law that cannot be gotten around; on the contrary, it is always a matter of considering it as a relation in a field of interactions, it is a matter of thinking it in an inseparable relation with forms of knowledge, and it is always a matter of thinking it in such a way that one sees it associated with a domain of possibility and consequently of reversibility, of possible reversal.

You see that in this way the question is no longer: Through what error, illusion, forgetting, by what lack of legitimacy does knowledge come to induce effects of domination that show the hold of [inaudible word] in the modern world? The question would rather be this: How can the inseparability of knowledge and power in the game of multiple interactions and strategies induce at once singularities that fix themselves on the basis of

their conditions of acceptability and a field of possibilities, of openings, of indecisions, of reversals, and of eventual dislocations that make them fragile, that make them impermanent, that make of these effects events—nothing more, nothing less than events? In what way can the effects of the coercion proper to these positivities not be dissipated by a return to the legitimate destination of knowledge and by a reflection on the transcendental or the quasi-transcendental that fixes it, but rather be inverted or undone inside a concrete strategic field, this concrete strategic field that induced them, and from the decision precisely to not be governed?

In sum, would one not now have to try to take the inverse path to the movement that tipped the critical attitude into the question of critique or, rather, to the movement that made the enterprise of Aufklärung again part of the critical project in such a way that knowledge can make a proper idea, would one not now have to try to take the inverse path to this movement of tipping over, to this slippage, to this way of displacing the question of Aufklärung onto critique? Could one not try to take this path, but in the other direction? And if it is necessary to pose the question of knowledge [*connaissance*] in its relation to domination, it would be first and foremost on the basis of a certain decisive will not to be governed, this decisive will, an attitude at once individual and collective of emerging, as Kant said, from one's immaturity. A question of attitude. You see why I was not able to give, to dare to give, a title to my paper which would have been "What Is Aufklärung?"

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, 1977), 113–138.—TRANS.

2. Henri Gouhier had opened the meeting of the Société française de philosophie by explaining that Foucault did not submit a title for his talk because of his extended visit to Japan.—TRANS.