

**GENEALOGY AND ITS RELATION TO POWER IN THE POSTMODERN  
PHILOSOPHY OF MICHEL FOUCAULT**

**SOY AĞACI VE MICHEAL FOUCAULT'UN POSTMODERN FELSEFESİNDEKİ  
SOY AĞACININ HAKİMİYET'LE İLİŞKİSİ**

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*Geliş Tarihi: 06.02.2021  
(Received)*

*Kabul Tarihi: 22.11.2021  
(Accepted)*

**ABSTRACT:** Michel Foucault is one of the most emblematic figures of postmodernism, who included a wide range of social-historical, philosophical-epistemological, cultural-anthropological issues through his numerous works. There is a rich assortment of matters in the works of Foucault: from his early interests in psychology and madness, through the birth of modern medicine and humanities, to the analysis of disciplining forms of the history of sexuality. By opposing modern views, he valorizes the peculiar effectiveness of the individual, discontinuous, and local critique compared to the driving effect of global and totalitarian theories, both on the theoretical and political level, although he acknowledges that theories such as Marxism and psychoanalysis created easier tools for local research, however he believed that they are reductionist and imposing in practice, and should be replaced by a plurality of forms of knowledge and microanalysis. Genealogy is one of the key notions in his philosophy, through which he aimed at problematizing the truth of our everydayness: our bodies (sexuality), our social institutions (prisons, schools, hospitals, families) and scientific norms (normality, madness, health and diseases) which are in fact objects produced in historically changeable relations of power. The genealogical analysis suggested by Foucault aims to destroy the unity of the well-known and natural objects of our experience, at the same time being aware that such a political will is not created in theory but it needs action and people who would operate in such a way. The purpose of this paper is to examine genealogy through the prism of Foucault's thought and its relation to power.

**Key Words:** genealogy, power, genealogical analysis, archeology.

**ÖZ:** Michel Foucault, çok çeşitli sosyal-tarihsel, felsefi-epistemolojik, kültürel-antropolojik konuları içeren çok sayıda eseri aracılığıyla postmodernizmin en tanınmış figürlerinden biridir. Foucault'nun eserlerinde zengin ve çok renkli konu yelpazesi vardır: psikoloji ve deliliğe olan eski ilgi alanlarından başlayıp, modern tıbbın ve beşeri bilimlerin doğrultusunda, cinsellik tarihinin disiplin biçimlerinin analizine kadar uzar. Modern görüşlere karşı çıkarak, Marksizm ve psikanaliz gibi teorilerin daha kolay yerel araştırma araçları yarattığını kabul etse de, küresel ve totaliter teorilere hem teorik, hem de politik düzeyde itici etkisine kıyasla bireysel, süreksiz ve yerel eleştirinin kendine özgü etkililiğini değerlendirir. Yine de, uygulamada indirgemeci ve empoze edici olduklarına ve bu

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teorilerin çok sayıda bilgi ve mikroanaliz biçimiyle değiştirilmeleri gerektiğine inanıyordu. Soy ağacı, onun felsesindeki temel kavramlardan biridir ve günlük hayatımızın gerçeğini sorunsallaştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bunlar: bedenlerimiz (cinsellik), sosyal kurumlarımız (hapishaneler, okullar, hastaneler, aileler) ve bilimsel kuramlar (normallik, delilik, sağlık ve hastalıklar) aslında tarihsel olarak değişken güç ilişkilerinde üretilen nesnelere. Foucault tarafından önerilen şecere analizi, doğal deneyimlerimizi iyi bilinen yanlarını ezberbozarak iyi bilinen bilgi birliğini yok etmeyi, aynı zamanda böyle bir siyasi iradenin teoride yaratılmadığını, ancak eyleme ve faaliyet gösterecek insanlara ihtiyaç duyulduğunun farkındalığını amaçlamaktadır. Bu makalenin amacı, şecereyi Foucault'un düşünce penceresinden açıklamayı ve hakimiyet'le olan ilişkisi üzerinden inceleme yapmayı hedefler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** ağacı, güç, şecere analizi, kazı bilimi.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Foucault initially employs the concept archaeology to differentiate his historical approach, first, from hermeneutics, which seeks a deep truth underlying discourse or an elucidation of subjective meaning schemes, as well as to distinguish from the models of the modern such as causal models and superficial-deep models.

The beginning of Foucault's transition from archeology to genealogy is observed in 1970, aiming at a more adequate theorization of the material institutions and forms of power, and although it signals a new shift, it is not an obstruction in his works, but above all an expansion of the circle of analysis, a more convenient thematization about social practices and relations with power that will be present in his thought and writings throughout the time.

Similar to archeology, Foucault also distinguishes genealogy as a new form (of historical thought) of historical works, while, for him, the genealogist is the young historian.

If his first interest is archeology, the second is undoubtedly the genealogy of particular disciplines, the types of their specific origins, phenomena and transformations.

“There are three possible genealogy domains. First, a historical ontology of ourselves in our relationships with truth which allows us to constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; then, a historical ontology of ourselves in our relations to a field of power where we constitute ourselves as subjects in the process of acting on others; finally, a historical ontology of our relationship to morality which allows us to constitute ourselves as ethical agents” (Foucault, 2001, f. 1437).

### 2. GENEALOGY

Foucault considered himself an intellectual geologist, always aiming at re-examining of evidence and assumptions; as well as shaking the habitual ways of working and thinking: dissipate conventional data, re-evaluate rules and

institutions, and starting from this re-problematization, to participate in the formation of a new political will.

Thus, according to Foucault, through genealogy, the truth of our everyday existence is problematized: our bodies (sexuality), our social institutions (prisons, schools, hospitals, families) and scientific norms (normality, madness, health and diseases) which are in fact objects produced in historically changeable relations of power.

The genealogical analysis suggested by Foucault aims to destroy the unity of the well-known and natural objects of our experience. He was aware that such a political will is not created in theory but it needs action and people who would operate in such a way.

Genealogy also reveals the extent to which we are effects of power, for the truth that makes the laws, that produces the discourses that transmit power and expands itself upon the effects of power, is the product of relations of power, so much that we are condemned, determined to a certain mode of living and desiring.

“By the truth I don’t mean some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted, but is a about the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true” (Foucault, 2001, f. 160).

Historical genealogy is not philosophy, it studies empirical phenomena and does not claim to discover the ultimate truth, but at the same time it has relations to sciences, to analyses of scientific type or to theories which respond to rigorous measurements, thus leading us to detailed findings on ancient love, madness or prison, which at the same time have been scientifically proven and eternally subjected to revision, as have the discoveries of other sciences.

According to Foucault, the genealogy of science can not be reduced to the simple history of great discoveries or scientific theories, since it is not from the borrowed genesis of the subject of science and the object of knowledge, the disposition of which is interface, but the scientist deals with science then it returns with kindness.

“Genealogy does not oppose history like the conceited and profound view of the philosopher against the mole gaze of the scholar; on the contrary, it opposes the metahistorical unfolding of ideal meanings and indefinite teleologies. It opposes the search for the “origin” (Foucault, 2001, fv. 1004-1005).

Genealogy lies in the disposition, which consists of rules, traditions, teaching, special buildings, institutions, power, etc., and which is committed and perpetuates the recipe of science “rules of producing statements which are accepted as scientific truths”, scientific games about truth, success and learning games, of improvable and improved mistakes.

According to Foucault, genealogy is also the intertwining of erudite knowledge with the knowledge of ordinary people, which is made possible by repealing in advance the tyranny of global and comprehensive discourses, together with the hierarchies and privileges of their theoretical avant-gardes:

“Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allow us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today” (Foucault, 2009, f. 79).

Preliminary, he defines that what the local character of criticism indicates in reality is an autonomous noncentralized kind of theoretical production, one, that is to say, whose validity is not dependent on the approval of the established regimes of thought, that should not be taken to mean that its qualities are those of an obtuse, naive or primitive empiricism; nor is it a soggy eclecticism, an opportunism that laps up any and every kind of theoretical approach; nor does it mean a self-imposed ascetism which taken by itself would reduce to the worst kind of theoretical impoverishment (Foucault, 2009, f. 76).

According to him, this local character of the criticism was enabled precisely through the return of knowledge, or an insurrection of subjugated knowledges.

“Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal. On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledges one should understand something else, something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault, 2009, f. 77).

Genealogy methodologically politicizes all aspects of culture and general life, thus seeking to achieve a single goal: it thematizes the birth of modern practices that are normalizing and disciplining in essence.

Genealogy also reveals the extent to which we are effects of power, for the truth that makes the laws, that produces the discourses that transmit power and expands itself upon the effects of power, is the product of relations of power, so much that we are condemned, determined to a certain mode of living and desiring.

### **3. GENEALOGY of POWER**

The genealogical understanding of ourselves, our social institutions, and our practices reveals how power mechanisms are effectively incorporated into social entirety, and demonstrates how can the individual create new effects of power.

“Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions - an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are

dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them." (Foucault, 2011, f. 28).

In other words, this means that genealogy not only reveals the omnipresence of power (which is always present, not because it incorporates everything but because it comes from everywhere), but also its productivity, because it is not just repression and does not just say no, since by inciting pleasure and forms of knowledge, it creates discourses.

In fact, according to Foucault, power should be understood as a network of relations, which are responsible for the creation of the subject as the product and representative of power.

"There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to [one's] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (Foucault, 2001, f. 1042).

This means that power, just as knowledge, is not in ownership of the subject, because power creates influence on the levels of desires, and on the level of knowledge as well. Away from it, to hinder knowledge, power creates it. (Ферн, 2002, p. 145).

This is also the chief topic of Foucault's philosophy – "The idea of power and its relation to knowledge", which is found in almost all of his works.

Opposing the Marxist principle that power is in the hands of the working class, he also analyzes the fact that class is a sociological abstraction, even the one which is experienced at the individual and collective level.

The idea of the "ruling class" has never received an adequate formulation, and neither have other terms, such as "to dominate", "to rule", "to govern", etc. These notions are far too fluid and require analysis. We should also investigate the limits imposed on the exercise of power - the relays through which it operates and the extent of its influence on the often insignificant aspects of the hierarchy and the forms of control, surveillance, prohibition, and constraint. Everywhere that power exists, it is being exercised. No one, strictly speaking, has an official right to power; and yet it is always exerted in a particular direction, with some people on one side and some on the other. It is often difficult to say who holds power in a precise sense, but it is easy to see who lacks power" (Foucault, 2001, f. 1181)

According to him, it may be that Marx and Freud cannot satisfy entirely our desire for understanding "this enigmatic thing which we call power, which is at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous". Theories of government and the traditional analyses of their mechanisms certainly don't

exhaust the field where power is exercised and where it functions (Foucault, 2001, f. 1180).

Nevertheless, despite numerous differences between the legal-liberal concept of power that we find in the philosophers of the 18th century and the Marxist conceptualization, he considers that there is yet a common point that he will name economization:

“In one case we have a political power, that has the procedure of exchange and the economy of circulation of goods as its formal model; while, in the other case we have a political power which, in economy, finds the reason of its historical existence, the principle of its concrete form and its actual functioning” (Foucault, 2009, f. 87).

On the other hand, the huge differences between the two systems of power analysis are obvious, whereas the first is the old system of the 18th century authors, which is articulated around the idea of power as inherent right and that can be traced to build sovereignty where the contract serves as the matrix of power, and any overflow of the very terms turns into abuse and oppression.

“Power-contract, where as a limit, or, rather, beyond crossing of the limit, oppression stands” (Foucault, 2009, f. 91).

On the other side, we have the system which would try, on the contrary, to analyze political power according to the contract-oppression scheme, where repression was not what oppression was in relation to the contract, but, on the contrary, the simple effect and the simple pursuit of a relationship of domination (Foucault, 2009, f. 91).

“Repression would be nothing else than the implementation of a perpetual balance of power within this pseudo-peace in which a continuous war is on” (Foucault, 2009, f. 91).

Thus, in both power analysis schemes, the genuine difference is not that between the legitime and the illegitimate, but that between war and submission.

“Actually, this is a great unknown: who applies power? Where is it applied? We know approximately who uses it, where does the profit go, through which hands and where does it enter again, while power... We know quite well that rulers do not keep power. Foucault, in general, considers that, regardless of how much we try to avoid economic schemas of power analysis, two massive hypotheses are inevitable:

“On the one hand, the mechanism of power would be repression - hypothesis, if you will, which I will conveniently call the Reich hypothesis - and, secondly, the basis of the power relationship is bellicose confrontation of forces - a hypothesis that I will call, again for convenience, the Nietzsche hypothesis. These two hypotheses are not irreconcilable, on the contrary; they even seem to be linked together with enough plausibility: is not repression, after all, the political

consequence of war, as was oppression, in the classical theory of political law, the abuse of sovereignty in the legal order” (Foucault, 2009, f. 90).

According to him, the second hypothesis overthrows Clausewitz’s famous definition that war is merely a continuation of politics by other means; not that it is only a political act, but even a genuine political instrument, it is the continued politics itself by other means, and claims that politics is the ongoing war by other means, from which we can draw three conclusions.

“First this: that power relations, as they function in a society like ours, are essentially anchored in a certain balance of power established at a given moment, historically precise, in war and by war [...] And the overthrow of this proposal would also mean something else: namely that, within this "civil peace", political wars, clashes over power, with power, for power, changes in relations of power - accentuations on one side, reversals, etc., -, all this should, in a political system, be interpreted only as continuations of the war. And should be deciphered as episodes, fragments, movements of the war itself [...] Finally, the overthrow of Clausewitz’s aphorism would mean yet a third thing: the final decision can not come only from the war, that is to say, from a showdown of force where weapons are the ultimate judges” (Foucault, 2009, f. 90).

He does not use the word power only in the sense of physical and military force, but, for him, power is also manifested through the ways in which society is regulated, with innumerable threads of rule and resistance to it.

“By power, I do not mean “Power” as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body” (Foucault, 2011, f. 122).

According to Foucault, what must be understood by the term power firstly is the “multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies”

In an interesting interpretation by Umberto Eco, it turns out that by differentiating the differences in the relationship between power and knowledge, between discursive and non-discursive practice, Foucault’s works clearly underline the distinct understanding of power, which has two characteristics - power is not

only seen in repression and the deprivation of rights, but also in the encouragement of speeches and the creation of knowledge, as well as the fact that power is not alone and massive, it is not a one-direction movement by those who command to their subordinates (Eco, 1983).

This kind of definition of power had an impact on Roland Barthes also, who lets us know that power is not alone, informing us that it exists even where it is not visible, and is versatile at the same time, it appears in groups as well:

“We discover then that power is present in the most delicate mechanisms of social exchange: not only in the State, in classes, in groups, but even in fashion, public opinion, entertainment, sports, news, family and private relations, and even in the liberating impulses which attempt to counteract it” (Bart, 2010, f. 13).

This is the reason why Barthes will call “the discourse of power any discourse which engenders blame, hence guilt, in its recipient” (Bart, 2010, f. 13).

Even after the probable changes, the power will return in the new state of affairs.

The similarity and compatibility we find with another of Foucault’s thoughts on omnipresence of power is evident especially here: The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere (Foucault, 2011, f. 123).

According to Eco, this image of power, carefully observed, reminds us of the system which linguists call language:

“It is true that language uses compulsory means (I cannot say I want an IF since nobody would understand me), but this compulsiveness is not a result of a decision of an individual or power center, from where rules are distributed: this compulsiveness is the result of the society, there is a compulsiveness apparatus which serves the purpose upon which all agreed, nobody wants to take responsibility about grammar rules, but all agree that those rules should be respected and expect the same from the others, since this state is convenient to the community” (Eco, 1983, f. 41).

Moreover, he considers it as a form of instruments of power, thanks to the systematization of knowledge.

“Power is the parasite of a trans-social organism, linked to the whole of man's history and not only to his political, historical history. This object in which power is inscribed, for all of human eternity, is language, or to be more precise, its necessary expression: the language we speak and write” (Bart, 2010, f. 14).

Power is not based on the ability to speak as such, but on speech which matches and is strengthened in a certain order, set of rules, language as a code. (Eco, 1983, f. 38).

Language, says Barthes, obliged to posit myself first as subject, thus what I do is merely the consequence and consecution of what I am; I must always choose between masculine and feminine, for the neuter and the dual are forbidden me; Further, I must indicate my relation to the other person by resorting to either tu or vous; social or affective suspension is denied me. Finally, he concludes that the language with its structure implies an inevitable relation of alienation and that language is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech (Bart, 2010, f. 15).

Similarly, we also find the conclusion in Foucault that power is manifested and laid through language, and this is best noticed in relation to sex:

“Power acts by laying down the rule: power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law. It speaks, and that is the rule. The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive character. (Foucault, 2011, f. 114).

Umberto Eco poses another Foucauldian dilemma: How is it possible for power, built by the network of agreements, to be destroyed? (Eco, 1983, f. 47).

Or as Foucault himself would say: Should it be said that one is always “inside” power, there is no “escaping” it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to the law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner?” (Foucault, 2011, f. 125).

Regarding this dilemma, at the same time, Foucault will answer there: “This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations... The points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities, at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior. Are there no great radical ruptures, massive binary divisions, then? Occasionally, yes. But more often one is dealing

with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society- that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds” (Foucault, 2011, fv. 125-126).

In this sense, the power within which is the individual, is experienced in such a way that agreements on which it is based are severed within him, concludes Eco, posing at the same time the other issue, that of the extent to which Barthes’s language obeys the mechanisms of the power system of which Foucault speaks about? (Eco, 1983, f. 49).

“Considering language as a system of rules, not only grammatical, but also what we call pragmatism today; let’s say – conversion rules, according to which the answer should be related to the question posed. For the one who breaks this rule, depending on the situation, we think that he is uncultured, crazy, that he wants to provoke us or that he wants to escape the answer to the question posed. The literature which competes with language, represents a process of vanishing old rules and creating new ones: rules that can only be applied to a discourse or a current and which, above all, apply only to literary laboratory conditions” (Eco, 1983, f. 49).

Although the Foucauldian way of defining power, which is genially presented in the language by Barthes, it is not clearly positioned between neo-revolutionism or neo-reformism, it has the merits of abolishing differences and revising meanings between concepts of power and political initiative.

In the paper “La pensée du dehors” published in June, 1966 he will state:

The breakthrough to a language from which the subject is excluded, the bringing to light of a perhaps irremediable incompatibility between the appearing of language in it being and consciousness of the self in its identity, is an experience now being heralded at diverse points in culture: in the simple gesture of writing as in attempts to formalize language; in the study of myths as in psychoanalysis... We are standing on the edge of an abyss that had long been invisible: the being of language only appears for itself with the disappearance of the subject” (Foucault, 2001, fv. 548-549).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Foucault’s goal was to illustrate the relationship between knowledge and social practices and the power relations through which they were developed and applied.

Foucault’s theory of power represents the peak achievement of the entire discourse, since he goes one step further than all pro-Nietzschean thinkers, leaving the position of his belief, not only in the emancipatory potential of the modern, but

also in the possibility of getting a certain assessment of a social theorist, in the prism of the object of study.

His theory can also be understood as a conclusion of Nietzsche's project on detaching from modernity, its normative content, its desires and hopes.

What interests him is how power relations historically concentrate in the form of the state, and they are not reduced to it during the process, since for Foucault, the state is only a tactic of governance, a dynamic form and historical stabilization of the social relations of power.

The most significant contribution of Foucault to his power of is the conclusion that clearly informs us that power is not governance, an approach that makes him special, which is characterized by a successful analytical combination of its microphysics and the macropolitical affairs of the state, in the process of which, he does not limit their relations.

Foucault believed that power defends itself by mystifying its control over knowledge, privileging certain forms of discourse by giving them power, which they, in essence, do not possess. Knowing the origins of the constructed social relations of power enables the understanding of the limits and risks of the way we create knowledge and, by this, the basis on which judging critically and freely is offered to us.

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