Habermas on Heidegger and Foucault

Meaning and Validity in
The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity

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Meaning, Habermas warns us, should not be allowed to consume validity.[1] For once that happens the further exhaustion of the project of modernity and the loss of its normative content are inevitable. This is clear from the writings of those Habermas calls 'the theorists of the counter-enlightenment' – a category broad enough to include authors as diverse as Heidegger, Nietzsche and Foucault. One way or another, these philosophers are all undoing the intrinsic connection between meaning and validity. More-over, the political *mésalliance* of some of them serves to show how catastrophic the replacement of critical theory's commitment to 'the philosophical discourse of modernity' by some blend of post-modernism and post-structuralism is bound to be. For, according to Habermas, only a theory that respects the internal relation between meaning and validity, without eliminating the difference between the two, can be entrusted with the delicate task of defending the legacy of modernity, whilst retaining a critical perspective on the way it is materialised in society. And Habermas is sufficiently confident in the results of his *Theory of Communicative Action* to claim the title for his own theory and to counterpose it to a host of other attempts, which are successively shown to be mistaken or to have missed the opportunity of taking 'the alternative paths' (PDM, 295) implicit in their own problematics.

Such was the programme and the underlying intention of the famous series of lectures Habermas gave on 'the philosophical discourse of modernity': a series of criticisms in the first ten lectures, followed by an attempt to show that the 'alternative way out of the philosophy of the subject' (title of Lecture XI) lies in his own focus on a communicative reason which remains faithful to 'the normative content of modernity' (title of Lecture XII). Ironically, perhaps, the book succeeded in doing exactly the reverse: far from demonstrating the superiority of his own conceptual apparatus, and preparing for an equitable exchange among responsible intellectuals, Habermas seems to have estranged himself from his audience, to the point where his opponents accused him not only of *seriously* misunderstanding them, but of not having read them at all, as the following quotations from Derrida attest:

> It is *always* in the name of ethics, of an allegedly democratic ethic of discussion, it is always in the name of a transparent communication and of 'consensus', that the most violent infractions of the elementary rules of discussion are produced. It is *always* the moralistic discourse of consensus – or at least that discourse which pretends sincerely to appeal to consensus – that in fact produces the indecent transgression of the classical

norms of reason and democracy. Not to mention of elementary philology. ... The most prominent example ... is Habermas. ....[2]

> With a stupefying tranquillity, here is the philosopher of consensus, of dialogue and of discussion, the philosopher who claims to distinguish between science and literary fiction, between philosophy and literary criticism, daring not only to criticise without citing or giving a reference for twenty-five pages, but, even worse, justifying his non-reading and his atmospheric or hemispheric choices by this incredible alibi: 'Since Derrida does not belong to those *philosophers who like to argue [argumentationsfreudigen Philosophen*, my emphasis! (J.D.)] it is expedient [*ratsam*] to take a closer look at his disciples in literary criticism within the Anglo-Saxon climate of argument in order to see whether this thesis really can be held'.[3]

Far from opening up a dialogue, Habermas seems almost to have lost – at least in the eyes of some – his right to be a partner in any future exchange. Instead of taking sides here, we might do better to analyse what went wrong. For that something went wrong seems beyond doubt: not only Derrida, but almost every other author discussed by Habermas, found himself forced into a kind of philosophical Procrustean bed, which left him speechless before the critical questions addressed to him.[4] No one can claim, of course, to have a definitive reading of an author – not even the author could seriously claim this privilege – and it would be pointless to criticise Habermas merely because his readings of Benjamin or Nietzsche, of Derrida, Adorno or Heidegger, are somehow flawed or not particularly interesting. To supply a different reading of some of these authors merely for the sake of contradicting Habermas seems an uninteresting enterprise. But to show, by way of such alternative readings, that what is at stake is not only a misunderstanding, but a *systematic* misunderstanding; and that the 'system' of this misunderstanding is directed by a theoretical position which is both crucial to Habermas's own theory and contentious; that does seem warranted. And that is what I propose to do here. The whole problem is focused on the relation between a 'validity' and a 'meaning' which, according to a theory that itself seems to be 'consuming' its opponents, should not be allowed to 'consume' such validity. Could it be, we may wish to ask, that what we witness in Habermas's reading of Heidegger and Foucault is the effect of a theoretical position which, rather than sacrificing validity on the

altar of meaning, as Heidegger and Foucault allegedly do, undoes the internal connection between the two conversely – a theory of validity that in its turn consumes meaning?

I

When Habermas tells us that meaning and validity are intrinsically or internally connected, he seems to be thinking of a reciprocal causality between meaning and validity, of 'a dialectical relationship between the world-view structures that make intramundane practice possible by means of a prior understanding of meaning, on the one hand, and, on the other, learning processes deposited in the transformation of world-view structures' (PDM, p. 320). In other words, 'the concrete a priori of world-disclosing language systems is exposed ... to an indirect revision in the light of our dealings with the intramundane' (PDM, p. 321). Less technically formulated, and more appropriate to our concerns here: even if we were to adopt some kind of framework-relativism (and I will later try to explain in what sense Foucault and Heidegger can be regarded as framework-relativists), our discovery of horizons of meaning (e.g. *epistemes*, paradigms) is still not going to provide us with criteria for the validity of the statements, or of actions we undertake on the basis of such frameworks. On the contrary, the problem remains of how to discover whether specific validity-claims (claims to truth, rightness, sincerity) can be redeemed; and in the light of whatever such 'valid' experiences we may have, our framework will have to change.

Accommodating as this theory may seem to some weak version of framework-relativism – it allows for changes in the horizon of meaning – it is important to point out that such may not be its ultimate intention. In fact, a similar argument is already present in the early Habermas's assessment of Nietzsche, where he remarks that for all the Nietzschean pathos about our truth being only an extra-moral lie, this 'fictional' status of truth could still be sublated, as it were, in the context of a transcendental-logical pragmatism which points to the fact that some fictions are more serviceable than others in helping the species survive. There are '*gattungsgeschichtlich "bewährte" Fiktionen*'[5] (and these are the only ones we should care about and seek to pro-

mote. And if Nietzsche, some twenty years later, is still considered by Habermas to be the 'turning point' for the mistaken entry into postmodernity (PDM, title of Lecture IV), it is because postmodernity for Habermas consists in the mistaken belief that the fictional character of truth could be used as an argument against truth itself. Indeed, Habermas's disappointment with both Heidegger and Foucault lies in the fact that, instead of taking the alternative route of a 'communicatively revised' transcendentalism left open by Nietzsche in his writings, they wander into some kind of relativism which, conflating meaning and validity, can therefore be criticised by means of the same transcendental-logical pragmatics. Heidegger, he tells us, 'jumped to conclusions in identifying the disclosure of meaning-horizons with the truth [i.e., the validity] of meaningful utterances' (PDM, p. 320). Heidegger allegedly overlooked that this 'changed understanding of meaning has to prove itself in experience and in dealing with what can come up within its horizon' (ibid.) – an argument that recalls the young Habermas's pragmatist critique of Nietzsche.

Similarly Foucault, according to Habermas, simply reversed 'power's truth-dependency into a power-dependency of truth' (PDM, p. 274). Instead of finding in knowledge the guarantee for power (Bacon), power for Foucault is said to become the true face of knowledge. As with Heidegger, here too Habermas is convinced that such monstrous statements derive from a conflation of meaning and validity. Repeatedly, he points out that Foucault's ideas about an internal link between power and knowledge fall prey to a simple genetic fallacy, by seeking to draw conclusions about the validity of knowledge (e.g. that of the human sciences) from an investigation into the conditions under which such knowledge arises (e.g. the link between criminology and the prison in *Discipline and Punish*) or is applied (e.g. PDM, pp. 272-73, 415-16, n. 7 and 10). Hence what Foucault considers to be an internal link between knowledge and power is, according to Habermas, no such thing: his genealogical findings have no relevance to the validity of the disciplines whose history he attempts to unearth. As with Heidegger, what is overlooked by Foucault is the fact that 'it is only the *conditions* for the validity of utterances that change with the horizon of meaning' (PDM, p. 320) and that such changes do not affect the problem of validity.

The obvious question is: Is this true? Were Heidegger and Foucault doing what Habermas says they are? Were they simply brushing aside the difference between meaning and validity as such, relying on the existence of frameworks that are nothing more than 'protuberances of power',[6] or the effect of some '*ursprungs*'-philosophical 'background-occurrence' named Being (e.g. PDM, p. 295 and Chapter VI, *passim*)? Or are they, contrary to what Habermas believes, engaged not in undoing the internal connection between meaning and validity, but in articulating it differently? And if they could be shown to be engaged in the latter enterprise, does not the real question concern at what cost Habermas himself succeeds in preserving an *internal* connection between meaning and validity? And could it be, in the light of the cost, that the connection he seems to be pleading for turns out once again to be an *external* one?
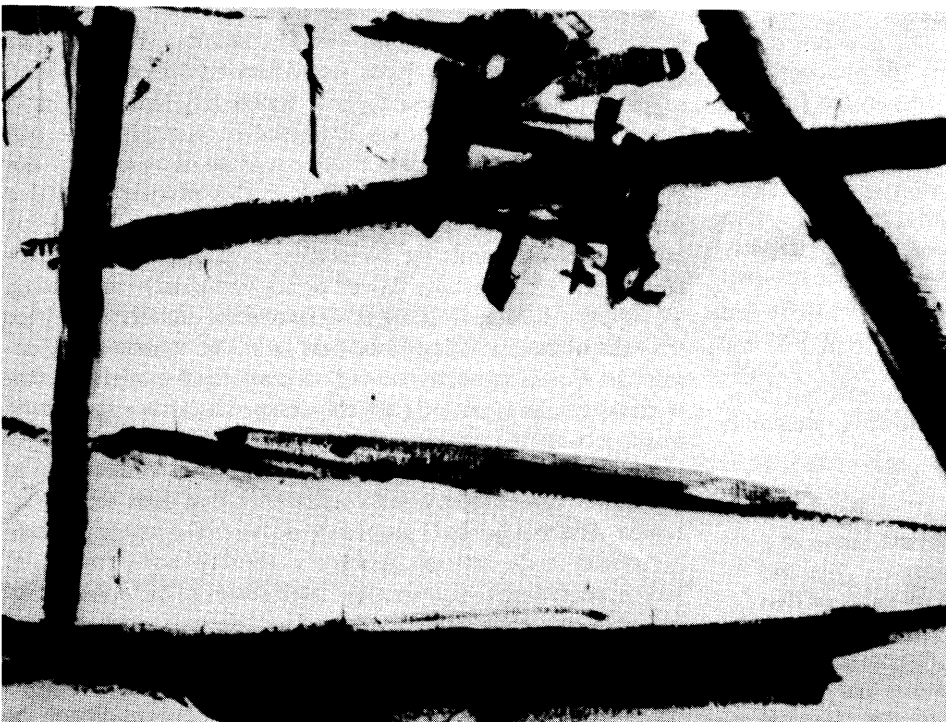
Habermas never tires of telling us that we can only understand the meaning of any given speech act when we *know* the conditions under which it can be accepted as valid (e.g. PDM, pp. 312-13, 319-21).[7] Validity, then, is a matter of *knowing* the conditions for validity. For example, truth is a matter of *knowing* the conditions under which a proposition can be confirmed as true. And, in order to know such conditions, one has to refer to the horizon of meaning dominant at the time. When this horizon changes, the conditions for the validity of utterances change in their turn. But this is all that happens, as Habermas stresses by introducing an adverb whose significance should not be underestimated: '*only* the conditions for the validity of utterances' change (PDM, p. 320 – my emphasis). This adverb is important for two reasons. First, because it suggests that Habermas believes theorists such as Foucault and Heidegger do not see this. Secondly, because one may wonder whether the 'internal' link between meaning and validity, even granting that it holds for the whole reservoir of meaning and the entire spectrum of validity (not only for truth, but also for rightness and sincerity) (PDM, p. 321), is not still conceived of in terms of knowing, of *theoria*. Changed conditions of meaning, different concrete *a priori*s of world-disclosing language systems, different *epistemes*, different frameworks, for Habermas these *only* necessitate a different grasp of the conditions under which any given speech act can be accepted as valid. Man's relation to truth, for example, would basically involve *knowing* the conditions that render a constative speech act acceptable and then presumably living up to them (but not to complicate matters further,[8] I will leave this aside). And the same would hold for man's relation to other dimensions of validity (sincerity, rightness). Any change of horizons of meaning, the very fact that there can be, as Habermas himself seems willing to admit, a change in such horizons, is only deemed to be important insofar as it changes conditions of *validity*. To be sure, such changed conditions of validity will give rise to learning processes which will in turn transform world-view structures, and thus at first sight the 'reciprocal causality' between meaning and validity seems to hold in both directions (though clearly under the aegis of validity itself). But does the role Habermas accords 'validity' here – the fact that, in conceiving of horizons of meaning in terms of conditions of validity, the stress is on *validity* and not on *conditions* – does this *theoreticist* bias in approaching the problem of meaning, this link between validity and the *knowledge* of its conditions, not endanger Habermas's claim to exclusive possession of a theory which intrinsically connects both terms *without eliminating the difference between them*? Is there not something missing, something Habermas might have picked up from such authors as Heidegger and Foucault, had he been less convinced of the need to conduct a rearguard action on behalf of the legacy of Enlightenment? Are not Heidegger and Foucault, in their different ways, questioning a move Habermas seems to take for granted: the assumption that man's relation to horizons of meaning, and to a validity which draws its conditions from such horizons, can be exclusively seen in terms of knowing, of *theoria*? For what, after all, does it mean for man to be in the truth, or to speak the truth? Could it not be that Habermas, Heidegger and Foucault have been giving different answers to the same question?

Let me first try to show how the need for a *non-theoretical* relation to truth arises just where Habermas would least expect it: in the fact that 'the conditions for the validity of utterances change with the horizon of meaning' – a fact that, *pace* Habermas, neither Foucault nor Heidegger overlooked, but which was at the centre of the framework-relativism they were defending.

Discourse, limitation and exclusion: such were the terms with which Foucault initially tried to account for the fact that truth (or falsity) can only occur within an *order of truth*. Certain conditions have to be fulfilled, certain models deployed, certain metaphors or concepts given preference over others, before a statement can be considered in its validity. Or better still: before a statement can be judged either true or false, before it can be considered as a candidate for truth or falsity, it has to fulfil certain conditions which are more complex than those governing truth or falsity in the strict sense. In order to be true or false, a statement first of all has to be taken seriously by the court that is to judge its merits, its validity. A statement has to be 'in the true'; it has to comply with the rules laid down by a 'régime of truth', in order to be either true or false. Not everything can be said in any given discourse; not all statements will be listened to in any given age; and therefore the realm of truth cannot but be finite. If there is to be truth (or falsity), it there are to be claims to validity, there must be first of all a 'régime of truth' that prescribes a principle – or set of principles – of relevance. And that is why Foucault should not be taken as simply attacking or denying truth, not even when he insists that there is a link between truth and power, and that it is senseless to oppose power in the name of truth, because truth itself is already a kind of power.[9]

Naturally, if one follows Habermas in taking such assertions at face value,[10] one will be unable to see in this 'politics of truth' anything other than an attempt 'scornfully' to reduce 'relationships of validity to the powers that triumph behind their back' (PDM, p. 324). Rather than acknowledging power's truth-dependency, Foucault's insistence on the link between truth and power would once more conduct us into the cul-de-sac where Nietzsche allegedly left us: it would leave us with an analysis that 'strips the history of discourse-constitutive rules of any authority based on validity and treats the transformative of transcendentally powerful discourse formations just as conventional historiography treats the ups and downs of political regimes' (PDM, p. 255). Truth would no longer be truth were it the mere expression of 'power strategies [that] intersect one another, succeed one another, [that] are distinguished according to the type of their discourse formation and the degree of their intensity; but [that] cannot be *judged* under the aspect of their validity' (PDM, p. 127 – Habermas's emphasis). All we would be left with would be 'a concept of power [that] does not free the genealogist from [the] contradictory self-thematizations' (PDM, p. 295) familiar from all attempts to claim validity for a *radical* critique of validity.

But the question is, of course, whether Habermas is not merely reading this aporetic self-refutation of a *radical* critique of reason that still wants to be reasonable (e.g. PDM, pp. 126-27, 341) into the works of authors such as Foucault, who, far from wanting to abandon reason or truth, may simply be trying to shift the meaning of such concepts in a direction which is not self-proclaimed irrationality, but a reason or a truth seeking to come to terms with its own conditions of possibility. For, as I already pointed out, Foucault is not interested in denying truth. Like Heidegger before him, the question he raises is what makes the truth true. If what provides for the possibility of truth or falsity is a certain régime involving selections and exclusions – a limited principle of communication – then what follows is not that there is ultimately neither truth nor falsity – or no communication at all – but that a certain 'self-evident', 'natural' way of thinking about these concepts has to be revised. And we not only need a revision of these concepts but a theory which could explain why these concepts have been conceived in their traditional form.

Such was Heidegger's programme: to understand how it

came about that *aletheia* had only been understood as correspondence and *adaequatio*; and why it was that, in speaking the truth, man forgot its ess*a*nce (where the 'a' stresses the verbal sense of *Wesen*) and its conditions of possibility. In raising such questions, Heidegger was also pointing to the fact that truth for man is not only a matter of taking validity claims seriously. Truth, to put it another way, is not only a matter of truth or falsity, but goes to the heart of man's Being. Or again: Man, in having to speak the truth, does *not only* have to comport himself as a responsible claimant to validity. What the truth demands of man is that, apart from operating within a realm of the true and the false, he also relates himself to the fact that he is related to such a realm, that 'there is' such a realm, and that his dependence on this 'there is' (*es gibt*) says something about his own Being. In other words, Heidegger realised that what is at stake in the history of truth is not only truth itself, but man's own ess*a*nce (*Wesen*). And this is why his attempt to think that history in terms of a forgetting of *aletheia*, of the essance of truth, or of what makes the truth true, was always linked with the attempt to restore man to his own Being by preparing a 'revolution [*Umwälzung*] of human Being'.[11]

IV

This fairly straightforward summary of the thrust of Heidegger's writings on truth, and the way they link up with Foucault's programme,[12] aims to show that what is at stake here might not be an attempt to let meaning 'consume' validity, but to think their interrelation in a different way. In fact, as Habermas's criticism of both Foucault and Heidegger makes clear, his contention is not merely that meaning and validity are *internally* related, but that this interconnection also involves a *symmetrical* or 'dialectical' relation. If Habermas's criticism of Foucault was simply that Foucault has severed the internal connection between meaning and validity by reducing truth to power – a criticism which, as we have seen, is certainly part of the argument – then it would suffice to repeat that Foucault does allow for truth, that he even seeks to *defend* truth by investigating discourse as its condition of possibility, and that his use of such terms as 'power', 'régime' or 'politics' vis-à-vis truth cannot be taken to suggest what Habermas reads into it. As soon as one realises that there is no real opposition in Foucault between, on the one hand, the idea that truth is linked to power in the sense of a limitation, and, on the other hand, an emphasis upon the productive character of power; as soon as one realises *that power, in order to be productive, has to be selective and exclusive*, one has already seen through what Habermas calls Foucault's 'systematically ambiguous' use of the concept of power – a concept Foucault is said to have forged by amalgamating 'the idealist idea of transcendental synthesis with the presupposition of an empiricist ontology' (PDM, pp. 274 and 270).

In Habermas's reading of Foucault, the fact that 'genealogical historiography is supposed to be both at once functionalist social science and at the same time historical research into constitutive conditions' (PDM, p. 274) points to the 'irritating double role' (PDM, p. 273) Foucault preserved for the category of power: 'on the one hand, it retains the innocence of a concept used descriptively and serves the empirical analysis of power technologies ... [whereas] on the other hand, [it] preserves from its covert historical sources the meaning of a basic concept within a theory of constitution as well' (PDM, p. 270). The same genealogy that descriptively lays bare power relationships as conditions for the rise of scientific knowledge and as its social effects is, according to Habermas, simultaneously forced to play 'the transcendental role of an analysis of technologies of power

that are meant to explain how scientific discourse about man is possible at all' (PDM, p. 274). Whereas Habermas may be right in detecting a certain ambivalence in the way concepts such as power/knowledge come to function in Foucault's texts,[13] he may be too quick to conclude that only this ambivalence lends 'the empirical analysis of technologies of power their significance as a critique of reason and secures for genealogical historiography its unmasking effect' (PDM, p. 270). For it is only because Habermas already seems to know what power is about that he is able to dismiss the relevance of such concepts as power/knowledge. Because Habermas is convinced that Foucault is attempting the impossible in ascribing transcendental capacities to the kind of empirical power strategies we all are already familiar with, he cannot see that Foucault is (or should be taken as) questioning this very familiarity by investigating the empirical bearings of an unfamiliar 'power': a 'power' which possesses a *constitutive* function. What 'Foucault' really discovers behind – or, rather, in – the empirical power-strategies his genealogy is trying to unearth, is a necessary limitation, a 'power' that does not merely have a negative function: a 'power' that produces because it limits.[14] For example, without some limits on the true, there would be no truth at all: if anything can be said, there is no longer an order of truth, but a chaos. Far from making validity impossible, 'power' *in the sense of* a necessary, constitutive limitation, is what, according to 'Foucault', allows for the possibility of validity as such. Meaning – the realm of a limited discourse, the régime of truth – and validity are internally connected: only within such a realm can there be statements that can be taken seriously as validity claims. Only because the number of candidates for truth or falsity is restricted in terms of conditions of 'well-formedness' can there exist truth or falsity.

Discourse, then, is a set of rules that imposes a basic homogeneity upon candidates for truth and falsity. It can only allow for the true and the false by first imposing on them the realm of the 'true'. Clearly, this version of *framework-relativism*, which does not let the truth of statements depend on a framework, but only their truth *or falsity*, their *possible* truth, cannot be taken to exclude objectivity. For there must be some objectivity if one is to decide *within* the framework between those statements that are true and those that are false. As D. C. Hoy puts it: 'the way the world is may determine what is true or false, but that will still not explain what is actually said, or comes up for counting as true or false'.[15] And here we have probably reached the heart of Habermas's objection. For even were he willing to grant that there is an *internal* connection between meaning and validity in Foucault, he would still be unwilling to accept its terms. For, according to Habermas, Foucault refuses to let the meaning of his frameworks be judged by the 'innerworldly success of the practice [they] make possible' (PDM, p. 154). In other words, what Habermas really opposes is the idea that the conditions for truth and falsity cannot themselves be judged in terms of truth and falsity (e.g. PDM, p. 255). Only conceptions of a meaning-horizon allowing for practices which will ultimately be able to determine the validity of such a horizon can do justice to the internal and *symmetrical* relationship Habermas posits between meaning and validity. And, since neither Heidegger nor Foucault seem to be willing to promote such a conception, Habermas tends to suggest that their theories *not only* deny the *symmetrical* relation meaning/validity, *but* any connection whatsoever. Validity is consumed by meaning as soon as one neglects the fact that 'whether the validity conditions are in fact satisfied to such an extent that the sentences can also function *is not a matter of the world-disclosing power of language*, but of the innerworldly success of the practice it makes possible' (PDM, p. 154 – my emphasis).

project,[16] and since, on the other hand, a discussion of the role and the position of the 'reconstructive sciences' in Habermas's work far exceeds the scope of this article, and would ultimately involve a full deconstruction of the whole Habermasian project, I will have to restrict myself to a few remarks that return us to the relation between meaning and validity.

The central question in the debate over meaning and validity seems to be whether what is claimed here (and elsewhere in Habermas's work), in the name of a *symmetrical* relationship between meaning and validity, is not doing the converse: letting validity consume meaning by making meaning ultimately *depend* on validity. It should be clear by now that one cannot even begin to investigate this problem, if one lets oneself be 'blackmailed' by the implicit presuppositions in Habermas's criticism of Heidegger and Foucault. Given that Habermas's own analysis of the 'symmetrical' relation between meaning and validity does not prevent him from placing it under the aegis of validity, the fact that Heidegger and Foucault seem to be defending a 'non-symmetrical' relation under the aegis of meaning cannot constitute grounds for simply dismissing their attempt. Nor can it be taken as a reason to conclude in their favour. As long as the discussion is couched in the terms Habermas imposed on his adversaries, the only thing which would permit us to choose would be proof that, at all times and as a matter of principle, crucial experiments for the assessment of régimes of truth are possible; i.e., that it is always possible to assess the conditions for candidacy to truth and falsity laid down by such régimes in such a way that what are considered to be 'relevant' statements in a given régime could somehow be shown to be inferior/superior to what is the case in another régime.[17]

But why should the discussion be couched in these terms? What is really at stake when Habermas decides that the transition between such régimes cannot merely be a matter of 'conversion' (Kuhn) to another régime or to another 'style' of scientific reasoning (Hacking); that it has to involve knowing, or being able to show, *ex post factum*, that what one learns in such a conversion compensates for what one dis-learns in abandoning another 'style' or 'régime'? Why can't we simply say that what is deemed relevant has changed: Foucault's happy positivism? And why can't we add, with Heidegger, that history is precisely the name for the experience that we cannot account for everything in terms of beings or of a highest being, but are ultimately exposed to the sending of a destiny (*Geschick*) which is *given* to us and never *fully* in our control?[18] In other words: what hidden anxiety has been setting the stage for this debate?

According to Habermas, this is precisely what is forgotten by Foucault and Heidegger when they reserve 'the title of truth for [something] which *no longer* has anything to do with a validity claim transcending space and time' (PDM – p. 154 – my emphasis; compare p. 155). Instead of seeing that language has 'to prove itself' through praxis (PDM, p. 335, and compare p. 154), these authors are said to let 'the "truth" of semantic world-disclosure *found* the propositional truth of statements [and] *prejudice* the validity of linguistic utterances' (PDM, p. 331 – my emphasis). They 'hypostatise' the 'luminous force of world-disclosing language' and no longer feel the need to let it 'prove itself by its capacity to throw light on beings in the world' (PDM, p. 154). Heidegger, for example, allegedly 'supposes that beings can be opened up in their Being with equal ease by any given approach' (PDM, p. 154) and hence finds himself defending a '*super-foundationalism* of a history of Being abstracted from all concrete history' (PDM, p. 104 – my emphasis). In fact, for Habermas, this 'abstraction from all concrete history' – extravagant as this claim may be regarding a philosopher who devoted all his efforts to think history – once more seems to concern the alleged denial in Heidegger (or Foucault) that the 'accumulation of knowledge could affect the previous interpretation of the world and burst a given totality of meaning' (PDM, p. 331), i.e., with the 'dialectical' feed-back between meaning and validity: 'As a result, intramundane praxis cannot get learning processes going' (PDM, p. 331).

Since it is ultimately the possibility of such learning processes, and the way to conceive them, that are in question, one would expect Habermas to do more than implicitly refer to the reader to the incorporation in his earlier work of a notion borrowed, *inter alia*, from Piaget's 'reconstructive science'. Suffice it to point out that Habermas seems to think that learning processes, since they also concern the *truth* of frameworks, not only operate *within* frameworks, but also allow one to proceed from one framework to another in such a way that the gains of learning compensate the dis-learning process involved: the truth of the next framework somehow has to encompass, or be on a higher 'developmental level' than, the truth of the foregoing one (e.g. PDM, p. 84), for otherwise one would once more be surrendering to what he calls 'the imperative force of an illumination compelling one to one's knees' (PDM, p. 255). Since, as far as I can see, one cannot find a *compelling* reason in Habermas's published writings to adopt this Piagetian theory and to preserve it in the face of its critics, including those sympathetic with the

V

As we have seen, the crux of Habermas's debate with Heidegger and Foucault – indeed, his motivation in taking it up – resides in his fear that these philosophers will deprive us of 'the transcendent moment of universal validity [that] bursts every provinciality [including the provinciality of a framework, R.V.] asunder' (PDM, p. 322). This seems to suggest that, although truth for Habermas may be dependent on cultural practices, it can never be immanent in such practices. Although a truth-claim will

always be made from within a provinciality, it can never satisfy itself solely with immanence. Of necessity, truth has a transcendent moment: 'though never divorced from social practices of justification, from the rules and warrants of this or that culture [discourse etc.], truth cannot be *reduced* to any particular set thereof'.[19]

But the question is, of course, whether the transcendent character one intuitively associates with truth – embedded as it seems to be in our practices of telling the truth – allows us to infer that comparisons between 'frameworks' along Habermas's transcendental-pragmatist lines must *eo ipso* be possible. Might it not be that truth's transcendent character is something one *only* experiences *within* a régime of truth, *within* a provinciality? Something that points to the paradoxical intertwinement of truth as an infinite task and 'truth' or discourse or *aletheia* as a finite realm within the necessity of such a task will be experienced always anew, but which cannot itself be judged in terms of true or false? Can we not take truth as an infinite task seriously, without knowing the truth of that which allows for the true is itself true? Are Heidegger and Foucault indeed undermining the very possibility of truth by claiming that the realm within which truth/falsity becomes possible involves limitations which are neither true nor false since they are what allows for truth and falsity? Can truth still be the task it is, once we admit that the situation-transcending import of truth-claims does not by itself point to the possibility (or, indeed, the necessity) of transcending, in the name of truth, that which allows for the truth? Do we need the transcendental-logical pragmatist reassurance that some orders of discourse, some régimes of truth, some 'truths' are more true than others, in order to take truth seriously? Can't we speak the truth, while accepting that ultimately 'truth' is finite, and that we will never have a more than finite relation to the truth?

If 'truth', *aletheia*, as Heidegger contends, always involves some 'untruth'; if a *lethe* is ineradicably present at the heart of *aletheia*; or if, as Foucault suggests, in order to speak the truth, man has to come to terms with the fact that there are necessary limitations on the realm he will enter; in short, if truth is itself finite and yet at the same time an infinite task, then taking this infinite task seriously only seems possible when we take our own finitude seriously: what we have is an infinite task, but never a non-finite truth. Indeed, what makes the task a *task* is precisely the fact that, in order to have truth, there will always and of necessity be something which escapes it: e.g., what Foucault points to when he differentiates between the 'truth' (as the régime of the true/false) and the truth.

Viewed from this angle, Habermas's suggestion that we must at least be able to decide in retrospect about the truth of a régime of truth, about the validity of a given horizon of meaning, that we must at least have the possibility of a non-finite truth, may well be another way of seeking to deny man's finitude, yet another way of thinking that finitude is something we can easily come to terms with, if only by the assurance that we are making progress toward the non-finite, gradually throwing light on the *lethe* that obscures *aletheia*'s heart. For what is revealed by this Habermasian desire for the truth to be fully true, so true that it even encompasses the truth of its own conditions of possibility? What is revealed by this desire informing Habermas's debate with post-structuralism, if not that truth cannot simply be related to some *uncomplicated* desire for the truth? What complicates this desire for the truth is not, as Habermas seems to fear, that the link between truth and desire would in and of itself threaten the truth. Rather, if there seems to be something threatening about the truth itself, if there seems to be something about the truth which man finds hard to bear, this is because the truth, *qua* intertwinement between a finite 'truth' and an infinite task,

confronts man with his own finitude and with his desire to escape this finitude. That is why for Heidegger the fact that, like truth, man is finite, turns finitude itself into a *task* demanding a certain *comportment* of man. And that is why, as suggested earlier, what is at stake in this debate between Habermas and Heidegger must ultimately be related to the question of what it means for man to speak the truth. This question is all the more important since Habermas's insistence on the symmetrical relation between meaning and validity seems to obstruct his access to the kind of ethics he really needs: an ethics that not only explains the possibility of dialogue, but which can also account for the possibility of its absence.[20] Paradoxically, it seems to be the Heideggerian concern with an ethics of finitude which is simultaneously an ethics of truth, that could help us out here.

Let me briefly try to clarify this by taking issue with the Habermasian claim that it is only the context-transcendent character of our notion of truth 'that keeps us from being locked into what we happen to agree on at any particular time and place, that opens us up to the alternative possibilities lodged in otherness and difference that have been so effectively invoked by post-structuralist thinkers' (McCarthy, p. 370 and PDM, pp. 322ff.). That is, the claim that the truth of 'post-structuralism' presupposes the truth of universal pragmatics – a claim which, as the title of Habermas's penultimate chapter indicates (PDM, pp. 294ff.: 'An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason'), explicitly organises the argumentative architecture of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

VI

For Habermas, Foucault's and Heidegger's refusal to turn the relation between meaning and validity into a symmetrical one, where meaning would ultimately be subjected to a proof of its validity, not only constitutes a threat to the meaningfulness of the project of truth, but also to the very possibility of dialogue and critique. Dialogue can only be what it is, can only find its motive and potential, in the transcendent character of the truth-claims we make. As McCarthy observes, 'without that idealizing moment, there would be no foothold in our accepted beliefs and practices for the critical shocks to consensus that force us to expand our horizons and learn to see things in different ways' (McCarthy, p. 370).

Is this so? Does the possibility of dialogue depend on the link McCarthy/Habermas are making here between their views on truth-transcendence, on meaning and validity, and on universality? Do we have to look for a non-finite truth that encompasses all finite orders of truth in order to save a concept of universality and, with it, the *possibility* of dialogue? What if we followed Merleau-Ponty in substituting for such a 'universality from above' a universality that would have to be conceived in a 'lateral' way?[21] What if it were *this* kind of universality that makes the true dialogue possible – not the transcendence of truth that breaks all provinciality asunder and opens me up for the other by also breaking his provinciality asunder, but the experience that, for all its transcendence, my truth-claim seems to be as inextricably bound up with my provinciality (order or régime of truth; *aletheia*), as the truth-claim of the other is with his? In other words, what opens us up to 'the alternative possibilities lodged in otherness and difference' mentioned by McCarthy (p. 370), might not be the situation-transcending character of the truth-claims *as such*, but the fact that this transcendence is tied to an immanence which at first sight closes us off from, estranges us from the other. In the light of a certain *ethics* of truth – the kind of ethics at the centre of Heidegger's concern with the truth – it is not the experience of a possible common identity (univer-

sality from above), but the experience of my own identity which I cannot share with the other, that can throw a bridge between us (lateral universality). In other words, what we may be in need of is not, as Habermas thinks, 'an alternative way *out of* the philosophy of the subject' (PDM, title of Chapter XI and p. 301), but an *alternative* way *into* it. For, after all, would we need a dialogue, or an ethics of dialogue, if we were simply decentred, always already – *de jure*, if not *de facto* – intersubjective?

Ironically, perhaps, the philosophy that feels obliged to protest against those who are sacrificing validity on the altar of meaning may well find itself sacrificing subjectivity on the altar of intersubjectivity, oblivious of the fact that it thereby hollows out both concepts. Refusing to let meaning be consumed by validity, Heidegger, on the other hand, seems to be in a far better position to take Habermas's problem seriously and to ground the possibility of dialogue in an *ethics* of 'truth'. For Heidegger, the subject of truth is not decentred because it has no centre but the one it shares with others; it is decentred because it has a centre that is not that of the other. That is why finitude confronts us with the difficult *task* of discovering that at the centre of one's own relation to truth there lies a *non*-universalisable core, a moment of *non*-universality, from which we cannot and should not seek to escape, and which makes both truth and dialogue the infinite task we know they are. Having a centre *which it may neither abandon, nor comfortably nestle itself into*, the subject of truth which makes this finitude his own bursts open towards the other, by discovering the wound with which its 'truth' had always already afflicted it. At that moment tolerance is born, as we all are: in a cry of pain. No longer a marginal virtue, but 'the point at which recognition of our human condition can begin',[22] it will have to carry the weight of an ontological function.

Notes

1 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge: Polity, 1987, p. 320 (translation altered); henceforth: PDM.

2 Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man*, Paris: Galilée, 1988, p. 225 (my translation).

3 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988, p. 157 (Derrida is quoting from PDM p. 193; the emphasis is his own).

4 See, *inter alia*, the excellent commentary by B. Flynn in the fifth chapter of his forthcoming *Political Philosophy at the Closure of Metaphysics* and J. M. Bernstein's insightful discussion of Habermas's failure 'to recognize the philosophical discourses of modernity [Foucault, Adorno, Derrida] as the philosophical expression of artistic modernism' ('Frankfurter and French Fries: Between Modernity and Modernism' (review of PDM) in *Art History*, 11: 4, 1988, pp. 586-90 (quotation at p. 588).

5 Jürgen Habermas, 'Nachwort', in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Erkenntnistheoretische Schriften*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968, p. 257.

6 The expression was omitted in the English translation (PDM, pp. 275–76 – see the German original, p. 326).

7 For a systematic exposition of 'Meaning and Validity', see Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, pp. 295ff.

8 See, e.g., PDM, pp. 346-47: 'as a participant in discourses, *the individual, with his irreplaceable yes or no*, is only *fully on his own* under the presupposition that he remains bound to a *universal* community by way of a cooperative *quest* for truth.' I have emphasised the terms I will analyse on a different occasion when focusing on the role the alternative 'yes or no' is forced to play in Habermas's universal pragmatics.

9 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in *idem, Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings (1972-77)*, New York: Pantheon, 1980.

10 I cannot repeat here the attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the traditional reception of Foucault has been misled by the 'face-value' of his texts (see my *Michel Foucault. Genealogie als Kritik*, München: Fink, 1991).

11 Martin Heidegger, *Vorn Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (Winter term 1931-32), GA 34, p. 324.

12 For a more detailed analysis see my 'From Foucault to Heidegger. A One Way Ticket?', forthcoming in *Research in Phenomenology*.

13 I have tried to argue this in a number of places: 'Can Genealogy Be Critical? A Somewhat Unromantic Look at Nietzsche and Foucault', in *Man and World*, 23: 4, 1990, pp. 441-52; 'Foucaults Anführungszeichen', in B. Waldenfels and F. Ewald (eds), *Spiele der Wahrheit. Michel Foucaults Denken*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 298-319.

14 Since the term 'power' assumes a specific meaning here, the ultimate mistake would be to oppose *power*-strategies *because* they involve 'power'. The problem is to look for a model of critique that does not mix up the constitutive and the contingent (as a certain 'Foucault' – this much should be admitted – found himself doing) (see notes 10, 12 and 13).

15 D. C. Hoy, 'Taking History Seriously: Foucault, Gadamer, Habermas', in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 34: 2, 1979, p. 87.

16 Thomas McCarthy, 'Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's "Overcoming" of Hermeneutics', in J. B. Thompson and D. Held (eds), *Habermas. Critical Debates*, London/Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1982, pp. 57-78; B. Waldenfels, *In Den Netzen der Lebenswelt*, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1985, pp. 110-17; K. Meyer-Drawe, 'Zähmung eines wilden Denkens? Piaget und Merleau-Ponty zur Entwicklung von Rationalität', in A. Metraux and B. Waldenfels (eds), *Leibhaftige Vernunft. Spuren von Merleau-Ponty's Denken*, München: Fink, 1986, pp. 258–75.

17 No weaker version of a decisive test could do here, since, as suggested above, authors like Heidegger and Foucault are framework-relativists *in the sense that they think that what changes between frameworks is not simply the stock of attainable truths (in which case comparisons of scope would suffice), but also what it means to attain truth (Heidegger) or to be 'in the true' (Foucault)*. The strange thing about Paracelsus, for example, is not simply that he was serious about a lot of things we cannot possibly be serious about, but that what it meant for him to be serious about 'truth' seems to be something different from what it means to us. This is why a counter-argument to the kind of incommensurability at stake here (Hacking's second type, discussed as 'dissociation' in his *Representing and Intervening*, Cambridge: CUP, 1990, pp. 69-72) cannot rest with the attempt to show that all or part of a framework's empirical propositions have some bearing on its 'core propositions', and that there is therefore room for a 'dialectical feedback' between the two (cognitive pressure feedbacking in such a way that the framework itself would change). Rather, since a framework is not primarily defined by a set of core propositions, but by a 'style of reasoning' (Hacking), including a certain view of what it means to know, to argue seriously, to be relevant, to be 'in the true', the attempt to refute this position should include a way of showing that from one 'framework' to another, there is not simply progress in knowing, but also in what it means to know, to be 'in the true', etc. Habermas, of course, is well aware that he needs to come up with some kind of solution to this Hegelian problem and that is why he has been trying to use (and extend) the results of a Kohlberg–Piaget type of research to build in a diachronic moment into the framework of his universal pragmatics.

18 E.g., Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *idem, Basic Writings*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p. 299: 'Man can, indeed, conceive, fashion, and carry through

this or that in one way or another. But man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the real shows itself or withdraws.'

19   Thomas McCarthy, 'Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism', in *Critical Inquiry*, 16, 1990, pp. 369–70, and compare PDM, p. 323.

20   Whereas Habermas tries to ground the possibility of dialogue in an *ethics* of language, he accounts for the absence of dialogue not in ethical but in *political* terms (systematically distorted communication). I suspect that ultimately this dissymmetry in his analysis will prevent him from taking such distortions seriously.

21   Merleau-Ponty introduces the counter-concept of a 'lateral universality' (as against an 'overarching universality') in the course of his essay 'From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss', the problem being precisely 'how [to] understand the other without

sacrificing him to our logic or it to him' – see *Signs*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 115 (quote) and 120 ('a second way to the universal'). I will develop my own interpretation of these terms below.

22   Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London/New York: Verso, 1990, p. xiv.

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