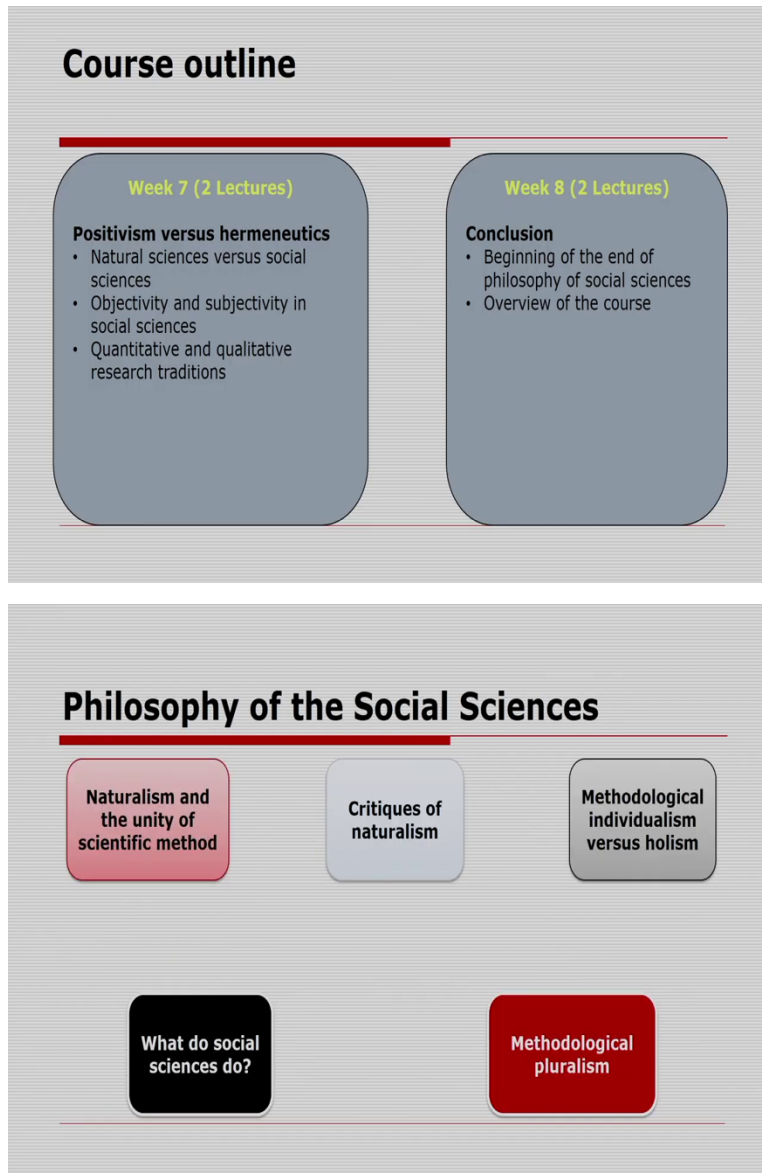**Philosophical Foundations of Social Research**
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Week 8 : Lecture No. 22
Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences

Hello everyone, welcome to this Massive Open Online Course on Philosophical Foundation of Social Research.

We are in the last week of this course. In this week we have discussed philosophy of the social sciences from the vantage point of 5 parameters naturalism and the unity of scientific method, critiques of naturalism, methodological individualism versus methodological holism, and then

what do holy sciences do? What are social sciences expected to do and then, methodological pluralism in contradistinction with methodological monism that positivists argued.

Philosophy of the Social Sciences

- ☐ C. Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* (1959)
- ☐ Two major theoretical traditions: inimical to the effective development of *The Sociological Imagination*
    - ◼ Comte, Spencer, Weber and Marx: to manipulate the evidence of history in such a way as to manufacture 'a trans-historical strait-jacket' (Wright Mills 1959: 22)
    - ◼ Grand Theory: the primary goal of the social disciplines should be that of seeking to construct 'a systematic theory of "the nature of man and society" (Wright Mills 1959: 23)

And then, in the last class we have discussed C. Wright Mills' the sociological imagination of 1959. How two major theoretical traditions obstruct the development or effective development of the sociological imagination for C. Wright Mills namely Comte, Spencer, Weber and Marx on the one hand and so-called grand theory on the other.

- ☐ Bell: the end of ideology
- ☐ Science of politics and society: relationship between philosophy and other cultural disciplines
- ☐ Language of morals
- ☐ Vocabulary of politics
- ☐ World of explanation and world of understanding
- ☐ End of grand theory
- ☐ Return of grand theory in the human sciences

Then, we have discussed Bells' the end of ideology sciences of politics and society the relationship between philosophy on the one hand, and other cultural disciplines on the other; as we have argued in the last class that we do not speak about morality as such, we do not speak

about politics as such, but we speak about the language of morals, the vocabulary of politics and so on. Therein lies the significance of the relationship between world of explanation represented by positivists, and world of understanding represented by phenomenological sociology, and so on. And therein, lies the significance of end of grand theory and we have discussed end of grand theory.

Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Return of Grand Theory

☐ To provide a critique of the way modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge-claims and practices of the human sciences

☐ The sciences of wo/man have subverted the classical order of political rule and have instituted a new regime of power

☐ Standards of 'normality'

Quentin Skinner
Mark Philp

And then, we will see there is a possibility that there may be a return of grand theory in the human sciences. I am trying to bank on the work of Quentin Skinner 'the return of grand theory in the human sciences'. If you look at the this, then you will find that, how Skinner in his, the return of grand theory in the human sciences, how he tries to posit through different authors- it is an edited volume- for example, he started with C. Wright Mills, then went on to discuss Gadamer, Dilthey, Heidegger and so on. He discusses Mark Philp, he discusses Michel Foucault for example. But, Foucault interestingly has been included in this edited volume by Quentin Skinner. How Foucault can be included in return of grand theory in the human sciences, that is interesting. Because Michel Foucault has been portrayed in such a manner that he always has talked about end of enlightenment, end of modernity, end of the subject, death of the subject and so on, thereby giving a befitting reply to Eurocentric worldview.

Now, that is why as I said at the first sight it might seem paradoxical to include Michel Foucault in the discussion on the return of grand theory in the human sciences. For all Foucault's novel philosophical and historical insights, his work is above all iconoclastic in intent. Foucault's major concern is neither to offer new solutions to holy philosophical problems nor to provide a

more adequate historical a count of our current difficulties. Rather he does both but only in passing. Foucault's primary objective is to provide a critique of the way modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge-claims and practices of the human sciences.

In other words, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, criminology, sociology and so on, the sciences of man as Foucault argues have subverted the classical order of political rule based on sovereignty and rights and have instituted new regime of power exercised through disciplinary mechanisms and the stipulation of norms for human behavior. For example in workplaces, school rooms, hospitals and welfare offices, in the family, the community, and in prisons, mental institutions, courtrooms and tribunals, the human sciences have established their standards of normality. Normality emanates from a set of norms, rules, regulations, values and so on. For example, the normal child, the healthy girl, the healthy body, the healthy boy, the stable mind, the good citizen, the perfect wife, and the proper man, such concepts hunt our ideas about ourselves and our reproduced and legitimated the practices of teacher's, social workers, doctors, judges, policemen and administrators. The human sciences' attempt to define normality and by establishing normality as a rule of life for us all, they simultaneously manufacture for investigation surveillance and treatment, the vast area of our deviation from the standard. Then what norm suggests perhaps, we are not able to follow that. And Foucault in this context offers us histories of the different modes by which human beings in our culture have been made subjects.

And we should note the ambiguity of the term subject. In what sense we must note the ambiguity of the term subject? The human sciences have made an individual both a subject of study as well as a subject of the state. And in this sense, the human sciences have thereby subjected us to a set of laws which they claim define our very existence of our very being: laws of speech, economic, rationality, biological functioning and social behavior.

Through the practices of these sciences we have become divided selves treating, sanity, health and conformity to social mores as components of our real selves and repudiating as foreign to us our diseases, irrationalities and delinquencies. An individual, as a universal category, containing within it a law of being is for Foucault an invention of the enlightenment and his much discussed prediction of the dissolution of man is arguably best understood as nothing more or less than the claim that the attempt to establish a political order upon a scientific understanding of human nature is both profoundly mistaken and profoundly unstable.

We are going to discuss Foucault's 'On the order of things' at length and in detail today. We can see then why speaking of Foucault in terms of a return of grand theory is ambiguous, although Foucault offers us novel philosophical positions and an often intriguing analysis of power and its place in maintaining political power, political and social order.

Foucault's primary aim is to aid the destruction of western metaphysics and the sciences of man. Foucault would deny that he is offering a new theory of social and political order because above all his concern is with the destruction of such theories and their normalizing and subjecting attempts to define some single cohesive human condition. If Foucault's comments on the future at best evasive, he undercuts his own works by modestly disclaiming them as fictions and if he frequently spends more time making clear that he is not saying then with stating his own position it is because his aim is to attack great systems, grand theories and vital truths and to give free play to difference, to local and specific knowledge, to rupture contingency and discontinuity. For Foucault, to act as a grand theorist is to commit the undignified folly of speaking for others, of prescribing to them the law of their being; it is to offer a new orthodoxy and thus a new tyranny.
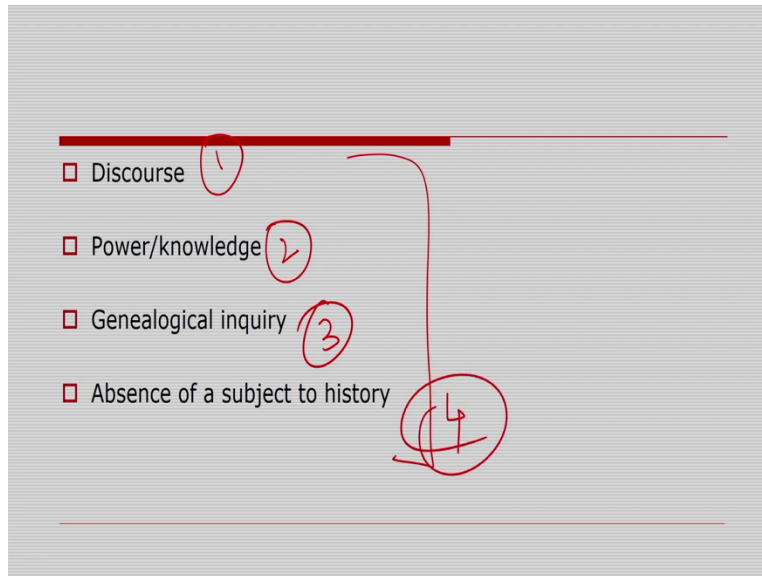
This general theme dominated Foucault's work throughout his 30 years as a writer. In that time, he produced books on this history of the management of mental illness, the birth of clinical medicine, the development of biology, philology and economics, the methodology of the history of ideas, the origins of the prison and the history of sexuality.

By 1970, his work had earned him sufficient reputation for him to be awarded a personal chair at the College De France in the history of systems of thought. His subsequent war on the prison and on sexuality was marked by a new concern with the functioning of power within social life. Although strong threads of consistency can be recognized through his works he repeatedly went back over his earlier works and reworked his ideas much to delight of his own followers, and to the confusion and irritation of his equally numerous critics.

What we are going to do in this lecture? We are going to focus on four aspects of Foucault which suggests, that Foucault also contributes to the debate on return of Grand Theory in the human sciences. These 4 are discourse; secondly the power-knowledge relation; thirdly, the place of genealogical inquiry and fourthly, the absence of a subject to history. Foucault's primary unit of analysis is the discourse.

A discourse is best understood as a system of possibility for knowledge. He rejects the traditional units of analysis and interpretation as the postulated unities in science, theories, paradigms and research programs. Foucault's analysis is not meant to offer a definitive interpretation of the elusive meaning of the text. Nor does he seek to reconstruct the rationality of scientific

discovery. Rather Foucault's approach is more skeptical and nominalist than this- his attention is focused on statements and objects of analysis.

His method is to ask, for example, what rules permit certain statements to be made? What rules order these statements? What rules permit us to identify some statements as true and some as false? What rules allow the construction of a map, model or classificatory system? What rules allow us to identify certain individuals as authors? And what rules are revealed when an object of discourse is modified or transformed or when homicidal monomania becomes viewed as moral degeneration or paranoid schizophrenia? Wherever sets of rules of these kinds can be identified we are dealing with a discursive formation or discourse.

Madness itself is a discourse, mental illness itself is a discourse, discipline itself is a discourse, punishment itself is a discourse, for Foucault. Thus Foucault is not especially concerned with those statements which are held as true in a given field of knowledge rather he is attempting to reveal the sets of discursive rules which allow the formation of groups of statements which are what Ian Hacking said true or false statements that is which can only be seen as true or false because we have ways to reason about them. I am referring to the 'social construction of what' by Ian Hacking. There what hacking suggested that through what parameters we can say that this is a true statement or this is a false statement? That is why a discourse can be seen as a system of possibility to generate knowledge; it is what allows us to produce statements which will be either true or false it makes a possible field of knowledge.

But the rules of discourse are not rules which individuals consciously follow; a discourse is not a method or a canon of inquiry. Rather, these rules provide the necessary preconditions for the formation of statements and as such they operate behind the backs of speakers of a discourse. Indeed, the place, the function, character of the knowers, authors and audiences of a discourse are also a function of these discursive rules. The context decides the content. A simple way to see something of the nature and force of Foucault's line of approach is to consider a systems of classification at the beginning of the Order of Things.
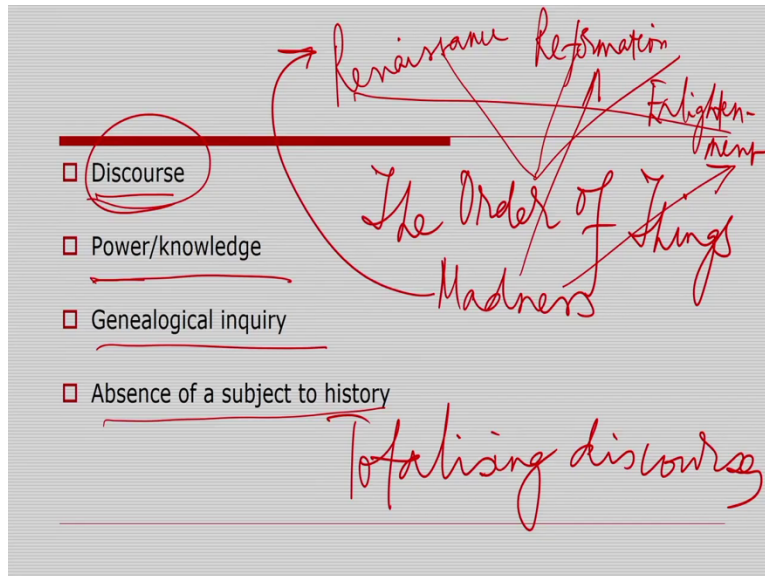
He quotes a passage from the Argentinian writer Borges purportedly taken from a certain Chinese encyclopedia which divides animals into the following categories: belonging to the emperor, Tame, Suckling Pigs, Sirens, Fabulous, Stray Dogs, included in the present classification, innumerable drawn with a fine camel hair brush, etcetra.

In the Order of Things, he tries to look at madness historically. Suppose if I have to classify era's or ages in 3 parts: One is renaissance, secondly reformation and thirdly enlightenment. How was madness considered during renaissance? How was madness considered during reformation? And how was madness considered during enlightenment?

Madness was construed as a divine creation during renaissance; madness was considered a criminal trait during reformation but during enlightenment madness was considered a medical condition. That is why when our real world phenomena, when our modes of production, when our intellectual and political consciousness change, our concepts are bound to undergo transformation. That is why you will find the construction of mental hospitals throughout the world is a post-enlightenment phenomenon.

Because prior to enlightenment, madness was never considered a mental condition, a medical condition. It was always considered a criminal threat or it was considered a divine creation. That is why when our epochs changes, our modes of production change, when our intellectual and political consciousness undergo transformation, our concepts, our ideas are bound to change. And such shifts in our concepts in our ideas have also brought about curious consequences.

The identification of a category of madness manifested only in horrific crimes. And, the associated lesson that some crimes are too horrible to be performed by fully rational psychologically normal agents gave rise to interpretations of cause, action and responsibility which dominate judicial practice, despite the fact that they are fundamentally flawed. We have adopted a conception of responsibility for action which not only presupposes the existence of an unclouded consciousness but also fixes on the rational intelligibility of the act and makes reference to the conduct, character and antecedents of the individual. We have also, accepted the axiom that only free acts can be punished. So, to be responsible for an act, that act must have been free. Yet paradoxically, the more psychologically determined the act that is the more consistent it is with who and what the individual is, the more legally responsible the actor is held. While, the more incomprehensible the act the more out of the character and the less determined by motive or reason it is the more it is excused.

Foucault's argument is that contemporary classification of delinquency for example, indeed our entire way of thinking about crime and criminality arise from a discursive formation or discourse which involves us in a morass of confused, conceptual, commitments. He has no special concern with the truth values of individual statements to be found in psychiatry and it is associated disciplines. What interests him is the way in which statements, which are true or false rest on a way of thinking about and reacting to criminality and that this way of thinking contrary to its claims of true scientific standing cannot be rationally justified.

We also get a sense of why Foucault is concerned with the functioning of power in modern society. Psychiatry and the other non-legal disciplines which police normality within the social order, within a formal disciplinary force, which has increasingly come to superintend the mores and life of our communities. But, to appreciate fully the truth of Foucault's argument we need to look in more detail at his discussion on the power-knowledge relation.

Foucault's view of power has changed since he first introduced the concept into his analysis. Fortunately, his more recent statements in late 70's and early 80's have been much more clearly formulated than his earlier comments. Foucault's is power as a relationship between individuals, where one agent acts in a manner which affects another's actions. Power relationships are to be distinguished from relationships based on consent or on violence, which acts upon a body or

open things it forces, it bends, it breaks on the will, it destroys or it closes the door on all possibilities.

So, power describes those relationships in which one agent is able to get another to do what he or she should not otherwise have done. It is always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their being capable of action and power is exercised only over free subjects and only in so far as they are free. Power operates to constrain or otherwise direct action in areas where there are a number of possible courses of action open to the agents in question.

While, much of what Foucault now says about power seems to fit comfortably enough with much liberal and radical thought. He departs from these standard accounts in his discussions of the power knowledge relation. Contrary to the liberal view that power is essentially a force which impedes the development of knowledge by repression and constraint, Foucault argues that power is an integral component in the production of truth. Truth is not outside power or lacking in power, truth is produced only by the virtue of multiple forms of constraint and it induces the regular effects of power.

Thus, for example, the existence of the human sciences presupposes the simultaneous existence of sets of power relations which have enabled their practitioners to structure the fields of possibility within which criminals, mad men, the sick, the old, the delinquent, and the putatively normal have had to act. Through their power to put others into action these practitioners have been able to observe, order, classify, experiment with and practice on these as in so far as both to put their knowledge into practice on the one hand and on the other hand to derive further knowledge from their practices.

We might say that once psychiatry had gained control of the esoteric class of agents classified as homicidal monomaniacs, they were able through experimentation and surveillance to develop new concepts and categories which were then taken back into the judicial arena and used to claim further areas and subjects for practice. This is not to say that their demands were uncontroversial indeed in these controversies we find specialists relying on their claims to specialized knowledge. That is their claims to knowledge were also claims to power the two become inextricably bound together.

We must also recognize that power for Foucault is not something delegated to the human sciences from the body traditionally seen as the central repository of the power that is the state, the most important political institution. On the contrary power is an inherent feature of social relations because it must exist whenever we can act in a manner which will affect the way that others act. The modern state is not simply the eighteenth century state plus the practices of the human sciences which it has seen fit to legitimate so as to extend its control over its population. On the contrary what we find that the human sciences grew out of enlightenment demands for a rational order of governance and order, founded on reason and norms of human functioning rather than on state power and the rule of law. And it was through the gradual growth and consolidation of their knowledge and practices that they colonized transformed and greatly extended the areas of state activity with the result that the state power mutated into its current discipline and normalizing form.

It is from the human sciences that we have derived a concept of society as an organism which legitimately regulates its population and seeks out signs of disease, disturbance and deviation so that they can be treated and returned to normal functioning under the watchful eyes of one or other policy system. State power, power of the government for Foucault is the end point of analysis; it is built up from innumerable individual exercises of power which are consolidated and coordinated by the institutions practices and knowledge claims of the disciplines.

Without these knowledge claims, the coordination of power relations into patterns of domination could only be temporary and unstable. Once we recognize this we can easily see that what Foucault is trying to do in his accounts of these discourses. Power-knowledge relation is also not independent of any discursive formation; is it is very much contingent upon a specific discourse.

Foucault explain his account as genealogies. Genealogy involves a painstaking rediscovery of struggles an attack on the tyranny of what he calls totalizing discourses; a rediscovery of fragmented, subjugated, local specific knowledge. This kind of genealogical inquiry is directed against the great truths, great systems and great synthesis which mark the power of knowledge, matrix of the modern order. It aims to unmask the operation of power in order to enable those who suffer from it to resist. In the modern encoding of power in discourses which discipline their participating populations and impose norms upon them, what is suppressed is local differential

knowledge, which is incapable of unity because it expresses the specific experiences of individuals and communities.

Foucault gives voice to the anarchic urge rather than to the urge of a new system and his support is lent to those who register the subjugating effects of power. Those who like some feminists refuse to, for example, surrender their bodies to the established practices of medicine, those whose resist professional attempts to claim specialized knowledge, those who demand the right to have a say in the manner of their debt, those who register ethnic social, religious, sexual or economic domination or exploitation and those who resist the identities imposed upon them by others as women have begun to resist their subjection to men, children to parents, the sick to doctors and as sections of the population have resisted interferences in their lives and environment by central and local authorities. These struggles are immediate responses to local and specific solutions. Situations above all spring from the sheer recalcitrance of individuals and Foucault's works are intended as a stimulant to this recalcitrance; they attempt to offer new spaces for the emergence of subjugated knowledge and for the organization of resistance.

But does this mean that Foucault wishes to liberate? Mark Phil suggests that Foucault helped, establish and run prison groups in the early 1970's might suggest that this is so but his purpose is not quite so direct. His critic of the prison is meant to open up its doors and allow the prisoners the right to be heard.

The prison has not worked as intended; no prison even approximates Bentham's vision of and hopes for the panopticon and Foucault's view is that it merely serves as a void into which to cast the delinquent. The prison shuts the prisoner up in both senses and the resulting silence allows the professionals to make what claims they like as to the curative process being enacted. Foucault's criticisms is directed against these professional claims: his aim is not a plan of reform but, the liberation of the prison, prisoner's voices for example through the practice of genealogical criticism.

On the one hand genealogy aims to stimulate the criticism and struggles which are suppressed by our current panel discourse where the prisoners only right is to obey the order of discipline but there is also another purpose of work. In many ways Foucault point in focusing our attentions, for example, on the many comparable cases which appear in his works is not to denounce us for what we have done to them. To show that we have made ourselves mad, sick and delinquent by

seeking to treat the madness, sickness and delinquencies of others by directing our surveillance beneath the surface of events to the hearts, minds and souls of the individuals before the bench we have simultaneously opened ourselves to that gaze and accepted our subjects into it.

And genealogy, above all involves the repudiation of the truth claims and the pretense of omniscience of the disciplines which now watch over us. At the heart of Foucault's work lies the conviction that there is no constant human subject to history. There is an absence of a subject to human history, that there is no valid philosophical, anthropological and thus, no basis for claiming that we can identify a coherent and constant human condition of nature. Certainly history does not reveal any such condition or nature nor is there any rational course to history. There is no gradual triumph of human rationality over nature; our own or otherwise nor is there any overarching purpose of goal to history.

So, the study of history can offer us no constants, no fixed categories, no comfort, no consolation, history is both uncontrolled and directionless. In describing Nietzsche's historical work, Foucault effectively describes his own. Let me quote Foucault here that "if effective history differs from traditional history in being without constants, nothing in man not even his body is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for the self-recognition or for understanding other man. History becomes effective to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets itself against itself."

The course of history, the narrative of human agency from past to present is an illusion. Our past is always an invention of our present and our present it seems must always see itself as a peak preceded by the lowly foothills of our emergent past. Foucault attacks this progressive view of history against order he said haphazard conflicts against consensus, incessant struggles. There can be no end to struggle for Foucault- individuals remain caught in webs of contingency from which there is no escape because there is no constant human nature, no essential human being that can stand outside this web and counterpoise this flux and impose a narrative order.

Struggle is both demanded by and is a condition of this pattern less process. It is necessary to avoid domination and yet it cannot guarantee liberation since the exercise of power over other is built on the premise that the tables can always be turned, dissolved and/or reconstituted. History,

knowledge and the human subject are fundamentally rooted in contingency, discontinuity and iniquitous origins. For Foucault we are poor things and rarely our own.

What in this lecture we have tried to do? We have tried to, give some indication of what Foucault is trying to do and so far as not only end of theory is concerned end of ideology, end of grand theory, end of philosophy of the social sciences is concerned, rather what we are trying to do how he has gone about his task? How his contributions can also be looked at by examining the return of grand theory in the human sciences through these 4 parameters; namely discourse, the power-knowledge relation, genealogical inquiry and absence of a subject to history. We might want to say that this makes Foucault's philosophy coercive in that it is concerned with producing effects rather than with rational argument and persuasion perhaps.

Skinner further argues that but this misses the fact that if, we are disturbed by what he says it is because his fiction are recognized as familiar. It is as if they bring to awareness our inchoate experience of life of them in the modern state. Given this understanding of the return of grand theory in the human sciences, we can see that he differs from many of the other theorists including in this survey of the resurgence of return of grand theory, in that for all his archaeological metaphors, he is not so much excavating a new territory for theory as undermining old areas of certainty.

Then, he was going against naturalist explanation, he was going against positivist explanation, that nothing is certain in this world and we must be certain about the world of uncertainty. With the loss of the certainties insisted on by the science of man we are left once more with a field for our differences struggles and resistances. This may leave us no longer sure who and what we necessarily are? But Foucault will have succeeded if he has left us believing that no one can know this with greater certainty than ourselves.

If you at what we have discussed in this week as such: We started with philosophy of the social sciences. How philosophy of the social sciences seeks to bring about a rational construction of social sciences and also critique of social sciences.

Then we have discussed, philosophy of the social sciences through 5 vantage points, 5 parameters: naturalism and the unity of scientific methods, secondly critiques of naturalism, thirdly methodological individualism versus methodological holism; fourthly, what do social

sciences do; fifthly, methodology pluralism. Then we have discussed, philosophy of the social sciences through the work of C. Wright Mills the sociological imagination of 1959.

Then we have discussed Daniel Bell and others. We have tried to look at the relationship between world of explanation and the world of understanding then we have discussed end of grand theory. And then, in today's lecture we have discussed possible return of grand theory , then we have discussed, how in this context we have tried to bring in Michael Foucault and his how his aim is to provide the critique of the way modern societies control and discipline their populations by sanctioning the knowledge claims and practices of the human sciences; how Foucault argues that the sciences of man have subverted the classical order of political rule and have instituted a new regime of power.

Then we have discussed standards of normality, then we have discussed, how Foucault emphatically mentions that how human beings in our culture have been made subjects, how he analyzes that man is both the subject of study as well as a subject of the state and when the concept of state comes in, a political institution comes in, there are certain controversial debatable issues which come up like power, political order, social order and he argues in favor of the destruction of western metaphysics and the sciences of man.

And that is how he attacked great systems, grand theories and virtual truths and he advocated in favor of difference, local and specific knowledge, rupture, contingency and discontinuity. Then we have discussed, Foucault's narratives, Foucault's philosophical foundations which have significant implications for social science research methods through 4 parameters: these 4 are one, discourse; second, the power knowledge relation; third, the place of genealogical inquiry and fourthly, the absence of a subject to history. In the next lecture we are going to provide an overview of the course and then we will end it. Thank you.