

RESPONSE TO DR. GLASS'S ESSAY ON FOUCAULT AND HEIDEGGER

by Asher Haig

Having just read the essay written by Dr. Glass in the March 2000 *Rostrum*, I felt that a response was necessary. I want to begin by saying that I appreciate such a thorough examination of the kritik (critique). It seems to be an important area that begs further discussion -- particularly in areas that conflict with philosophical understandings of the work that is being utilized in the round.

It seems, however, that the essay relies on a limited approach to Foucault in order to attack the position of the kritik in debate. Many of these issues seem to rely on an understanding of the kritik that ignore current or potential developments.

It seems that the article comes down to a few points:

1. Kritiks are inherently contradictory with debate because debaters use them "to win."

2. Kritiks establish their own "truth" in the process of the debate round.

3. Kritiks demand rejection of modes of thought, inherently creating the same situations they indict.

4. Kritiks aren't unique.

5. Kritiks aren't "competitive" which ultimately becomes a means for excluding the affirmative team and establishing a regime of truth.

Not so surprisingly, these five arguments seem to make up just about every 2AC that I hear when running the kritik. I have trouble finding these to be compelling arguments.

Perhaps the problem is not the kritik or the forum, but the manner in which they have been combined? I have several particular responses to the arguments advanced in the essay.

Debate is Inherently Contradictory

It seems that Dr. Glass's point seems to be that the use of either Foucault or Heidegger within debate necessarily relies on what each of them would classify as calculative thought — an analytical mode of discourse that believes everything can be reduced to a manner of causality that is defined in terms of a population. In other words, we think about people in a way that makes them people rather than individual persons, each one represented as a number

rather than an individual.

I'm not sure why this necessarily conflicts with debate. Certainly, both Heidegger and Foucault find conflict with the mode of analytics that is used to describe the realm of policy, but to say that they reject the analytics of policy-making as a whole seems to ignore the agenda of both. A fundamental part of Foucault's critique is to reinsert the "I" in a mode of discourse that is so reliant on the "we."

To say that Foucault's representations cannot be utilized in terms of policy analysis ignores a large part of Foucault's work — *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, and all of the *History of Sexuality* books come to mind. This description of Foucault's work seems to selectively utilize Foucault's analytics in favor of describing Foucault as "a historian." Certainly, Foucault fits within the field of history, but I think that many would find dispute in the claim that he was a *historian*.

Foucault's work might make more sense put in terms of anthropology. This distinction can probably be best understood from Foucault's *The Order of Things* and *Archaeology of Knowledge*. The purpose is very much to reject the notion of history as it is currently conceived — but that does not leave Foucault in a realm of historical nihilism.

Fundamental to this understanding is the concept of the genealogy. Although not explicitly considered until *Archaeology of Knowledge*, the approach is clearly considered in all of Foucault's works. The concept seems to be to understand history in terms of its contingencies — to go beyond our simplistic understandings or representations of history and realize that those representations are simply part of history itself — culturally constructed understandings of what "is." Foucault's analytics involve a deeper investigation, sometimes so deep as to ignore the surface entirely, expecting the observer to piece together new meaning from that which is exposed. The point is to analyze the historical process in terms of what is now.

This distinction is seen in Foucault's work as the distinction between Continual History and the Genealogy. Foucault's rejection of continual history means that we must begin to try to understand history not in terms of now, trying to prove why the status quo was inevitable, but in terms of the past, trying to understand why the now is contingent — part of a historical process of knowledge that was *not* inevitable.

Now the question probably remains, where does this come back to debate? It seems to me that the point is rather simple: the kritik in the debate round serves as a form of Genealogy. It is an approach to policy making intended to understand the manner in which we enframe (to borrow from Heidegger) our political process in terms of certain political formations of knowledge. The purpose of the kritik is thus twofold: one is to expose, the second to de-struct (more on this later).

Understanding the Contingencies vs. Negating

And so we've all heard it before — "It's negation theory. We just have to prove the affirmative wrong." The questions seems to remain: What the Hell does that mean?

Dr. Glass argues that Foucault's position is that rejection is not an option. He quotes Foucault as saying "These pre-existing forms of continuity, all these syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense. They must not be rejected definitively of course, but the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized..." (p25, *Archaeology of Knowledge*). The insight indicates rather a middle ground that does not appear to be considered. Certainly Foucault does not advocate rejections in terms of absolutes. Humanism is not bad — it is merely contingent. The distinction comes in the manner of approach.

To reject the affirmative does not

mean to refuse its framework. Negation theory seems to mean quite the opposite — we, as the negative, don't have to prove the affirmative's *framework* wrong, merely the approach to resolve that framework. The kritik is a process of exploring those contingencies and exposing them. If we can illustrate what is wrong with a policy, the natural step that follows is not to accept that policy as a solution. This serves, in Foucault's words above, as part of the process to show that "the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed."

Thus endorsing the kritik does not mean endorsing some sort of new replacement framework that would represent a new regime of truth, but instead voting not-aff. The consequence certainly means voting neg, but that is not on the pretense that voting neg somehow rejects as a whole the framework the affirmative used. Much to the contrary, voting negative recognizes the contingencies that are inherent in such a framework, a first step toward finding an alternative.

Ultimately the importance of this view is in understanding that Foucault does not find the concept of rejection problematic, but instead the manner in which we move toward rejection. Accepting is the binary opposite of rejecting. Voting negative, then, might be better understood as not-accepting, rather than rejecting.

Leaving Foucault Behind

All of these arguments seem very obsessed with accepting or denying Foucault in binary terms. Certainly there may be contingencies within the forum of the kritik itself, but it seems that the exact point, as established above, is not to necessarily reject, but to recreate or to develop. That seems to mean that rather than refusing the kritik because of potential problems we should work to develop beyond those problems. It seems to me that a large part of that process means using Foucault's theories to move beyond Foucault. There is never an explicit denunciation of the debate forum. The methods, however, seem to serve as a perfect forum for the modes of resistance that Foucault discusses. A fundamental part of that resistance includes the creation of a Counter-Hegemony — in effect a new mode of truth that serves to counteract the existing, dominant mode. The claims that the kritik is a truth-claim seem to be interesting *non-sequiturs*. Foucault's point is never that truth does not exist or is necessarily bad, but that we should recognize the sociologi-

cal construction of truth. It is not a matter of avoiding truth-claims altogether — such a move is impossible — but of understanding the political implications of particular claims to truth.

It seems impossible to divorce argument from agenda. Even Foucault carried a constant agenda, beginning with May 1968 and the response to socialism, where Foucault breaks away from the socialist movements in search of a new form of resistance. The point seems to be that nothing is neutral — the kritik is not an exception. This does not seem to be a reason to reject the kritik out of hand. The point seems to be that the kritik has an agenda which conflicts with the affirmative. One or the other has to win out — the very structure of debate. I'm not sure why this necessarily conflicts with the philosophical process as discussed by Foucault. In fact, using the analysis that nothing is neutral and the understanding that rejection is impossible, it would be impossible to ever have a discussion that could result in change; we would always reject things that are said to have an agenda, and since everything has an agenda, we would never go anywhere.

The Question of Uniqueness

At a more technical debate level, such criticisms seem to face the question of uniqueness that is fundamental to disadvantages.

Dr. Glass's description of uniqueness is that "it would not matter much if the plan resulted in inflation if inflation was already occurring." This in itself seems to make some sense — unless you are involved in economics and are working from the recognition that inflation is necessarily evil. The following explanation clarifies the position: "unless there was an additional and unique harm to increasing inflation further." Such a clarification seems to change the consideration dramatically.

The point seems to be that things can always get worse. It seems to be the purpose of the kritik to prove why this is true. Perhaps the problem is that we have to reconceptualize the meaning of uniqueness. Perhaps putting it in a different context makes it easier to understand. The affirmative (200 years ago) says that slavery exists now, and says that we should reform the work conditions for slaves. The negative says that slavery is bad to begin with. Wait - this claim seems hopelessly non-unique working from the current notion of uniqueness. Affirmative claims that kritiks are non-

unique disads work from very much the same position.

But let's assume that it isn't unique, for a moment. So what? A non-unique case turn still serves as an absolute (that is, absolute) solvency take-out with at least a *risk* of uniqueness. That still seems to be a reason *NOT* to endorse the affirmative.

***Fiat* is Illusory (Directed at Kritik Debating in General rather than the Essay)**

Yes it is. Such an observation, as Dr. Glass notes, seems to be utterly absurd. The point of policy debate (need it be said) is to analyze policy. What use (even if it does make logical sense) is it to say that the affirmative has to talk about policy (they have to be topical) and then to say that the only issues that matter are critical ones? Similarly from the opposite side, what sense does it make for an affirmative to advocate a policy (that the federal government should do) and then say that *fiat* doesn't exist in order to escape a discussion of the political implications of it? Seems to me to be an artificial distinction.

It also seems, however, that such a recognition of the absurdity of these claims allows us to develop a new forum for kritik. *Fiat* seems wholly irrelevant — the point of the kritik is that the affirmative would be a bad idea. The affirmative's job is thus to prove that it would be a good idea. Suddenly — <gasp> — we're debating *LINKS* to the kritik!

The Alternative and Notions of Change

Perhaps the biggest problem I've seen in kritik debating (on both sides) is that no one either utilizes the notion of the alternative or debates the kritik in terms of the alternative. In this sense, the argument is that the performance of the kritik actually creates change. That is *NOT* to say that endorsing the kritik endorses change (although that is certainly a viable concept) but instead to say that by running the kritik, the negative team actually creates change within the round. This concept will serve in a moment to illustrate why a permutation is nonsensical.

The point is that voting negative endorses the de-struction (removal of the structure) established by the 1AC. The affirmative is responsible for defending their structure that they have established. The point is that political change is misconceptualized. We understand change solely in terms of the political, and we un-

derstand the political solely in terms of the government. Foucault's ultimate point is that the government is not a privileged structure. To the contrary, the government exists solely on cultural terms — it exists because we want it to exist, it continues because we keep sending people to make it continue.

The point, then, is that the political can mean more than the government. If the government is merely a result of culture, then why can't we change the government by changing culture?

Permutations

So why can't we do the affirmative at the same time?

Well hopefully, there will be a link to the kritik. What's the point of doing the affirmative if the link proves that the plan is a bad idea? Beyond this, the manner in which permutations are traditionally structured makes them necessarily intrinsic permutations (as well as severance). First, the permutation severs out of the IAC framework that it establishes. The kritik argument is that the plan means nothing without the framework upon which it is based — the rest of the IAC. Those things are things which have been said and done. The affirmative doesn't just get to forget about them. Second, The permutation tends to come in the form that "well we link, let's just change that so we don't!" In other words, the affirmative could say academic achievement should be increased, the negative says academic achievement is bad. Why does the affirmative get to say, "OK make academic achievement good"? Seems to be the very definition of intrinsicness and why it is abusive. If there's a specific link to the plan, why does a permutation let you just ignore it?

False Advocacy

So certainly there can be the accusation sometimes that the permutation is a false advocacy. What does that mean? Dr. Glass frames it in terms of exclusion — that the kritik says that the affirmative isn't allowed to agree. I think that this ignores the terms of the link. The links prove that is *impossible* for the affirmative to advocate the same thing as the negative — at least with any consistency.

Further, what does criticism mean if the affirmative is also making arguments about why criticism is a flawed concept? This seems to be a personal contradiction, not one that is forced.

Finally, given the negative's argument with the alternative about how voting affir-

mative reconstructs the framework that the negative is de-structing, why does it make any sense to vote affirmative unless the affirmative justifies its structure?

Beyond these theoretical issues of kritiking, there are three specific areas that Dr. Glass addresses that I feel need response.

Problem/Solution

Heidegger and Foucault both address the notion of the Problem/Solution mindset (a familiar phrase for those familiar with Spanos) — but in a way that is distinct from most people's understanding of the issue. The point is not that we cannot identify problems and then search for solutions. The point is that the way we generally do that is a myth — when we separate the two we simply ignore the manner in which we start with the solution and then work toward a problem as a justification. The problem/solution mindset is not one of political responses, but one of the order of things.

Liberation and the Ability to Speak

Paramount in Foucault's kritik of power is the notion that no one possesses power — it is not a matter of having it or lacking it. Power is exercised. It is not taken, it is used. To say that power is possessed traps people who don't have power in a discursive prison box — they are powerless and thus do not have the power to resist. Foucault's argument comes in response to this notion. Foucault believes that personal resistance is the only way to create change without reifying the disciplinary system that is so coercive and dangerous to begin with.

Foucault's point is that there is not one silence, but many silences (*History of Sexuality*), and that liberation is defined by the ability to regulate and manipulate these silences in favor of the dominant discourse. Liberation is not simply a matter of thinking out — that is the repressive hypothesis. Foucault says that while we think we have been repressed, the actuality of the matter is that we have been regulated — discourses have created schemes of regulation that are productive rather than silencing. Instead of silencing sexuality, we have produced new forms of discourse such as homophobia. Foucault's point is that speaking out has empirically only trapped us further. The idea is that through kritik we can develop new forms of resistance.

The Question of Rights

This resistance certainly at some point involves the question of rights and repre-

sentation in the law as well as legal equality. Dr. Glass says that "it is simply the case that Foucault believed in rights, and believed in the possibility of governmental change — he even participated in demonstrations, and argued for governmental changes which increased individual liberty." Such an observation is astute, but ignores Foucault's stated purpose in these demonstrations, as well as his conflicting interests. Further, it ignores Foucault's positioning as well as for *what* issues he was demonstrating. To quote David Halperin, "Foucault felt able to advance proposals because he could do so not on the strength of some antecedently established authority but on the basis of personal experience, communal participation, and a situated knowledge which he shared with his interlocutors. Far from prescribing courses of action... Foucault was describing and reflecting on developments in gay culture that he saw already taking place around him. (*Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography*, p100). The point seems distinct from the idea that Foucault simply supported the notion of rights. In fact, Foucault has been quoted numerous times discussing the concept of rights in relation to the subject — the point that he came to ultimately is that supporting the notion of rights is in conflict with the notions of the subject, but as he is able to engage in the personal de-struction of the subject (identity politics) at the same time he is able to support rights, he is able to support specific forms of legal equality.

That does *NOT* translate directly to meaning that all rights and all movements are acceptable immediately. The point is that we have to engage in forms of identity politics and avoid speaking for others. Identity politics ultimately means allowing people to define themselves rather than trying to define people through categories.

Foucault does not believe that such a thing as governmental change exists. To Foucault, the government is nothing more than a centralized position upon which discourses circulate. The government is not a privileged position of power, it is a reflection of culture. To create governmental change, a fundamental step is the realization of identity politics — individual cultural change that translates to new legal realities.

These ideas are intended to promote discussion and a move to a new understanding of critical debate theory. None of my references or argumentation above (*Haig to page 60*)

should be construed as personal attacks. Hopefully the post will spur some sort of response and potentially even a discussion.

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“I am speaking the language of exile. This language ... muffles a cry, it doesn't ever shout ... Our present age is one of exile. How can we avoid sinking into the mire of common sense, if not by becoming a stranger one's own country, language, sex and identity? ... Exile is a way of surviving in the face of the dead father ... of stubbornly refusing to give in to the law of death.” — Julia Kristeva

(Asher Haig debates for Greenhill School, Texas. His post to the CX-L LCX-1 @ debate net, is used by permission)