“Being and Power” Revisited

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At the heart of Heidegger's thought is the notion of being, and the same could be said of power in the works of Foucault. The history of being gives Heidegger a perspective from which to understand how in our modern world things have been turned into objects. Foucault transforms Heidegger's focus on things to a focus on selves and how they became subjects. And, just as Heidegger offers a history of being, culminating in the technological understanding of being, in order to help us understand and overcome our current way of dealing with things as objects and resources, Foucault analyzes several regimes of power, culminating in bio-power, in order to help us free ourselves from understanding ourselves as desiring subjects and disciplined bodies.

These rough parallels suggest that it might be illuminating to see how far the comparison of Heidegger's "Being" with Foucault's "Power" can be pushed. Do these terms designate equivalent functions? Do Heidegger's epochs in his history of being match Foucault's regimes in his genealogy of power? To what extent do their interpretations of our history lead these thinkers to criticize our current cultural condition in similar ways? What does each see as the danger? How does each envisage resistance? And, of course, we must also ask whether these thinkers differ in any important ways?

After all, Heidegger's early support of National Socialism and later recommendation of political passivity seem totally opposed to Foucault's emphasis on social freedom and his political activism. Obviously Heidegger is some sort of conservative and Foucault clearly is on the left. But lest the striking difference between Heidegger's and Foucault's political attitudes makes my project seems hopelessly misguided, we must remember Foucault's comment on Heidegger in his last interview:

For me Heidegger has always been the essential philosopher ... My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger. But I recognize that Nietzsche prevailed over him.

This last remark of Foucault's, when his immanent death freed him to tell the truth even in Paris, forces us to ask how Foucault, in spite of his radically different political ethos, could nonetheless claim, in some important sense, to have once been a Heideggerian? But we also need to ask in what sense Nietzsche prevailed in the end.

I. The Functioning of Being and Power.
It is important to realize at the outset that for Heidegger being is not a substance or a process. Being, in early Heidegger, is "that on the basis of which beings are already understood." One might say that a culture’s understanding of being is its style of life manifest in the way its everyday practices are coordinated. A culture's understanding of being allows people and things to show up as something—in Homeric Greece, people showed up as heroes or slaves and things as flashing up to be admired, whereas, in the Middle Ages, for example, people were understood as saints or sinners and things were creatures to be mastered and interpreted.

Put generally, the shared practices into which we are socialized provide a background understanding of what counts as things, what counts as human beings and what it makes sense to do, on the basis of which we can direct our actions towards particular things and people. Thus the understanding of being creates what Heidegger calls a clearing (Lichtung) in which things and people can be encountered. Heidegger calls the unnoticed way that the clearing both limits and opens up what can show up and what can be done, its "unobtrusive governance (Waltens)."

For Heidegger the history of being in the West has been the history of misunderstandings of the clearing. From the Pre-Socrates on, philosophers have sensed that something beyond ordinary beings was responsible for their existence as anything, but since the clearing, like the illumination in a room, must always stay in the background—or, as Heidegger puts it, withdraw—to do its job of letting things show us, philosophers since Plato have replaced the clearing with a highest being that is the ground of beings and the source of their intelligibility. For Plato the highest being was The Good, for Aristotle, The Unmoved Mover, for the Christians, The Creator God, and, after the Enlightenment, it was man himself. Heidegger calls all these attempts to replace the clearing with a “beingest being”, onto-theology. We will see later that, according to Foucault, power has suffered a parallel misunderstanding.

Indeed, many of Foucault's difficult remarks concerning power make sense if we take him to be getting at a social clearing, with an emphasis on the way the everyday practices of individuals and groups are coordinated so as to produce, perpetuate, and delimit what people can think, do and be. For Foucault, power, like Heidegger's being, is no fixed entity or institution, but is incarnated in historical social practices. "One needs to be nominalistic," he tells us, "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society." This strategical situation arises from specific individuals and groups opposing one another. These actions, taken together, open a social space in which people, things, and the real are defined. Like the clearing in Heidegger’s
account, power is productive. Foucault tells us: “[P]ower produces; it produces reality,” that is, it governs what things and people show us as and what it makes sense to do.

Thus, for Foucault, power, as opposed to violence, controls actions while nonetheless leaving them free:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized."

Like Heidegger, Foucault speaks of this non-violent way of guiding action as a mode of governance:

Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government. ... To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others."

One might say, paraphrasing Heidegger, that power is that on the basis of which human beings already understand each other. As Foucault puts it:

In the idea of governmentality, I am aiming at the totality of practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other."

Since Foucault is not interested in how things show up but exclusively in people, "Power", which is normally used to describe the way governments govern people's actions, seems an appropriate, if perhaps misleading, name for what controls the way people understand themselves and others. It should be clear that some type of power in this ontological sense is essential to any society. According to Foucault, “A society without power relations can only be an abstraction.”

II. *Seinsgeschichte* and Genealogy.

For everyday practices to give meaning to people's lives and unite them in a community something must collect the scattered practices of the group, unify them into coherent possibilities for action, and hold them up to the people. People can then act and relate themselves to each other in terms of this exemplar. An object that performs this function Heidegger calls a work of art. As his illustration of an art work working, Heidegger takes the Greek temple. The temple held up to the Greeks what counted as real, Heidegger says, and so established the meaningful differences such a victory and disgrace in respect to which the Greeks could orient their actions.
Generalizing the idea of a work of art, Heidegger holds that "there must always be some being in the open [the clearing], something that is, in which the openness takes its stand and attains its constancy." Let us call such special things cultural paradigms. A cultural paradigm is any being in the clearing that discloses a new world or, by refocusing the current cultural practices, discloses the current world anew. Heidegger mentions five types of cultural paradigms—works of art, acts of statesmen, nearness of a god, sacrifice of a god, and the words of a thinker. For brevity's sake, we shall concern ourselves only with the thinker's words.

The thinker, by being receptive to the current practices (both central and marginal), is able to reconfigure the practices by making the marginal central and the central marginal, and so bring about a new shared style or understanding of being. Heidegger calls the new beginning a founding leap—an Ur-sprung—that, by taking up marginal practices from the past, opens a new clearing. [T]his unmediated character of a beginning, the peculiarity of a leap out of the unmediable, does not exclude but rather includes the fact that the beginning prepares itself for the longest time and wholly inconspicuously.

For Heidegger, the words of the thinker as a cultural paradigm are an inexhaustible object of interpretation, not because the thinker was a genius or the text too full of meanings, but rather because there is a necessary absence in the text. Just because the thinker manifests the current understanding of being, he names what is so pervasive and embodied it cannot be made fully explicit. The new understanding of being thus pervades the work without being thematized. What is important is the way the thinker's words are attuned to the background understanding. Heidegger's clearest formulation of this difficult claim is in his essay "Reflection in Metaphysics":

The thinking of thinkers is neither something going on in "heads" nor is it the product of such heads. One can always consider thought historiographically in accordance with such viewpoints, and appeal to the correctness of this consideration. However, one does not thus think thinking as the thinking of being. Recollection of the history of being returns to the claim of the soundless voice of being and to the manner of its attuning.

The thinker’s unthought, as Heidegger calls it, is not a positive but hidden truth. Rather the text manifests a necessary structural absence.

The thinker can never himself say what is most of all his own. It must remain unsaid, because what is sayable receives its determination from what is not sayable.
Heidegger adds:

The historicity of a thinker, which is not a matter of him but of being, has its measure in the original loyalty of the thinker to his inner limitation. Not to know this inner limitation, not to know it thanks to the nearness of what is unsaid and unsayable, is the hidden gift of being to the rare thinkers who are called to the path of thought.17

There is, then, no hidden truth to explicate; the understanding of being, the background intelligibility, the attunement or style of the age, is on the surface in all of its practices. The thinker in his receptivity experiences what is going on in the practices and is able in his work to focus that style, but unlike a lucid agent, a thinker is never able to articulate explicitly what he is doing. Yet precisely because his work can change the understanding of being, a thinker is more effective than the most persistent agent. Likewise, the interpreter or preserver who returns to such founding thinkers can, by taking up practices from the heritage in a new way, contribute to changing the present practices.

Foucault in "What is an Author?" holds a view remarkably close to Heidegger's when he rejects commentary and introduces what he takes to be the right kind of return to the text of a founder of a domain of discursivity.

If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission, an omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension... It is always a return to a text in itself, specifically, to a primary and unadorned text with particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences.18

Foucault also sees the effect such an interpretation can produce:

It follows naturally that this return... constantly introduces modifications and that the return to a text is not a historical supplement that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and redouble it in the form of an ornament which, after all, is not essential. Rather, it is an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice.19

Yet, Foucault seems to agree with Nietzsche and argue against Heidegger, when he says, in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," that genealogy absolutely "opposes itself to the search for 'origins'"20 But, in fact, what Nietzsche rejects as origins is the idea that there is a rich truth that the thinker understood and the commentator must make more explicit, that both Heidegger and Foucault reject. When Foucault rejects commentary, he follows Nietzsche in proposing a return to
the point of emergence (Entstehung), which Foucault defines as "the entry of forces...the leap from the wings to the center stage." This corresponds almost exactly to Heidegger's account of the origin of the work of art as an Ur-sprung, an originating leap--a leap a thinker's thought brings about when, in that thinker’s saying, marginal practices become central and central practices marginal so that the understanding of being is re-gestalted. Foucault's account simply sounds like a more violent version of Heidegger's when he says:

If interpretation were the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, then only metaphysics could interpret the development of humanity. But if interpretation is the violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules, which in itself has no essential [i.e. intrinsic] meaning, in order to impose a direction, to bend it to a new will, to force its participation in a different game, and to subject it to secondary rules, then the development of humanity is a series of interpretations.22

These similarities between Heidegger and Foucault should not surprise us since it is the Hegelian/Gadarian notion of the continuous, mediated, unfolding from the origin of some positive cultural or personal identity that Foucault is opposing here--a metaphysical construct first defined and opposed by Heidegger. The notion of the origin as an originating leap, with its account of the emergence of incommensurate worlds, is meant precisely to reject this Hegelian teleological view of the implicit truth gradually becoming explicit.

But there is, nonetheless, at this stage, a real difference between Foucault and Heidegger. Heidegger holds two thesis Foucault rejects. The first is, that an originating leap can give a culture its identity, so that we in the West received our “historical essence”23 at the time of the Greek temple. Second, Heidegger holds that a culture unifies itself each time there is a new beginning. He thinks that struggle is always stabilized and focused in a world with a overall style, a world which, for a limited time, gathers together all of the culture’s “paths of destiny.” On Foucault's reading of himself and Nietzsche, there is no such tendency to stability:

The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.24 Historical emergence designates a place of confrontation, but not as a closed field offering the spectacle of a struggle among equals. Rather, as Nietzsche
demonstrates in his analysis of good and evil, it is a "non-place," a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space.\textsuperscript{25}

The main difference between Heidegger and Foucault, then, is that Foucault sees Nietzsche as affirming a continual instability in the practices defining both the self and the culture, while Heidegger points to the importance of a non-metaphysical but nonetheless essential tendency in the practices to gather into stable, unified worlds—a tendency that he calls appropriation (\textit{Ereignis}). Foucault accepts a Nietzschean emphasis on dispersion, but he is also pulled toward a Heideggerian account of gathering when he talks, for example, of the totalizing tendency of a carceral society. Once we realize that, in passages like the above, Foucault is arguing primarily against Hegel and not Heidegger, we will be prepared to understand how the Heideggerian picture of the way marginal practices coalesce to form stable unites comes more and more to dominate Foucault's account of the history of the West. Indeed, if we set aside the question of how stable cultural practices \textit{naturally} are—a question on which, if it makes any sense, Foucault and Heidegger deeply differ—and ask how stable the practices of an epoch \textit{can in fact become}, we will find Foucault's view approaching Heidegger's, as the two thinkers focus their analysis on the understanding of being characteristic of modernity.

III. The History of the Present

Both Heidegger and Foucault, no doubt influenced by Nietzsche, begin their account of our history with a pre-history in pre-Socratic Greece. Heidegger devotes many pages to showing that, although the pre-Socratics did not think about the clearing, they did not deny it either. They sensed that showing up or presencing depended upon what was absent or withdrawn, and truth was understood as unconcealment. But this understanding was lost when Plato took the Good to be the purely present ground of everything, and truth to be the correspondence of theoretical propositions to an independent reality.

Foucault too points to the emergence of theory among the Greeks as the great turning point in our history. The pragmatic and poetic discourse of early Greek civilization was destroyed by the rise of theoretical truth: "The Sophists were routed ... [from] the time of the great Platonic division onwards, the [Platonic] will to truth has had its own history ..."\textsuperscript{26} This change in the style of the practices presumably altered all aspects of Greek life. For example, Foucault tells us that "[T]he West has managed ... to annex sex to a field of rationality ... [W]e are accustomed to such "conquests" since the Greeks ..."\textsuperscript{27}
According to Heidegger, in the next major stage, the Roman understanding of beings as finished works (res)--produced rather than coming-forth (physis) or being-brought-forth (poesis)--set up the possibility of the medieval world of hierarchically ordered substances produced by a creator God.

Foucault has less than Heidegger to say about Greek philosophy, but he has much more to say about how the Self was produced, worked over, and administered in Antiquity. He also gives, at the beginning of *Discipline and Punish*, his own brief description of the stage of hierarchical, top-down monarchical power.

Finally, Heidegger's and Foucault's concerns converge upon the transformation that issues in modernity and our current understanding of things and of human beings. In his account of modernity, Heidegger begins by telling us that "Metaphysics grounds an age, in that, through a specific interpretation of what is, and through a specific comprehension of truth it gives to that age the basis upon which it is essentially formed." Foucault says more narrowly: "In any given culture and at any given moment, there is only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice."

The two thinker's parallel view of the history of the West comes into sharp focus, when we compare Heidegger's account of the origin of the notion of man in essay "The Age of the World Picture" with Foucault's account in *The Order of Things*. Both view the interest in representation in the thought of the Classical Age as showing the emergence of a new style of practices and as the crucial but unstable beginning of modernity--a starting point that is not yet clear about its radically new subject-centered understanding of being. Both agree too that this understanding first becomes explicit in Kant's interpretation of man, and finally works itself out in our contemporary technological understanding of being and of bio-power.

Heidegger tells us of a radical transformation in our understanding of being which took place in the 17th century. The change was implicit in Descartes' introduction of representation. Kant then made Descartes' unthought explicit in the centrality of his notion of Vorstellung. The age of representation differs in fundamental ways from all other ages: "What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth."

To represent means to bring what is present at hand before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm ... What is decisive is
that man himself expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself and
that he makes it secure as the footing for a possible development of humanity. Foucault emphasizes that for Kant, since man objectifies everything, he also objectifies himself.
So, for Foucault, “Man appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as subject
that knows.”

Both agree that, with Kant, man becomes the source of the meaning of everything and so
philosophy becomes anthropology. In Heidegger’s terms:

[Anthropology] designates that philosophical interpretation of man which explains
and evaluates whatever is, in its entirety, from the standpoint of man and in relation
to man.

For Foucault, philosophy, which Kant claimed to have awakened from its dogmatic slumber, thus falls into an anthropological sleep.

And both Heidegger and Foucault reach rhetorical heights as they look forward to the end
of the humanistic understanding of being. Heidegger:

Man cannot, of himself, abandon this destining of his modern essence or abolish it
by fiat. But man can, as he thinks ahead, ponder this: Being subject as humanity has
not always been the sole possibility belonging to the essence of historical man, ...
nor will it always be.

Or Foucault:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date.
And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they
appeared ... then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face
drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.

But not long afterwards each thinker realized that man was, indeed, being erased, but that this post-
humanism was not the liberating development each had expected. (Strangely, in this case as in
many others, Foucault seems to have to repeat Heidegger’s mistakes, even though, by the time
Foucault wrote, Heidegger had already corrected them.

IV. Our Contemporary Understanding of Being/Power.

In “The Age of the World Picture”, Heidegger illuminates our current understanding of
being by looking at one of its greatest achievements, scientific research. His account of modern
scientific practices is similar to Thomas Kuhn’s in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. What
Heidegger calls research resembles what Kuhn calls normal science. Research operates by setting
up a total interpretation of some region of reality and then attempts to show that the anomalies that emerge can be fitted into this total account. Heidegger’s researchers, like Kuhn’s normal scientists, keep busy by taking for granted that their general plan is correct; that the anomalies it reveals have no truth to tell, so that in the end they must all be brought under the projected total order. Thus, scientific research is made possible by Descartes’ unthought, fully focused in Kant, that rationality consists in human beings imposing a total, systematic order on all that is. Heidegger calls this totalizing understanding of being, technological. I will call it technicity to distinguish the style of the practices from the technological devices these practices produce and sustain.

Like many current critics of the modern age, Heidegger at first failed to distinguish the modern epoch that was coming to an end from the beginning of the post-modern epoch. Thus he was for a time under the illusion that the danger of technicity was that people were dominating everything and exploiting all beings for their own satisfaction. As if man were a subject in control, and the objectification of everything were the problem. Thus Heidegger says in 1940:

Western history has now begun to enter into the completion of that period we call the modern, which is defined by the fact that man becomes the measure and the center of beings. Man is what lies at the bottom of all beings; that is, in modern terms, at the bottom of all objectification and representability.37

By 1946, however, Heidegger saw that the modern understanding of being was coming to an end; that exploitation and control were not the subject's doing, and "man" never was anything but an effect of other forces.

Even this, that man becomes the subject and the world the object, is a consequence of technology's nature establishing itself, and not the other way around.38

Thus, in his final analysis of technicity, Heidegger is critical of those who, still caught in the subject/object picture, think that technicity is dangerous because it embodies instrumental reason. Technicity, he insists, is "something completely different and therefore new."39

To bring out the nature of technicity, Heidegger describes the hydroelectric power station on the Rhine, because for him electricity is the paradigm stuff revealed by technicity.

The revealing that rules throughout modern technicity has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging-forth. That challenging happens in that the energy concealed in nature is unlocked, what is unlocked is transformed, what is transformed is stored up, what is stored up is, in turn, distributed, and what is distributed is switched about ever anew.40
Heidegger’s intuition is that everything is being turned into resources that are subject to endless disaggregation, distribution, and reaggregation so as to order and optimize everything. But we can see now that electricity is not a perfect example of technological stuff since it ends up finally being turned into light, heat, or motion to satisfy some subject’s desire. It does not capture the idea that stuff is switched about ever anew nor that they are, as Heidegger says, “driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense.”

Thus, as soon as he sees that information is truly endlessly transformable, Heidegger switches to computer manipulation of information as his paradigm. The goal of technicity, Heidegger then tells us, is more and more flexibility and efficiency simply for its own sake. There is no longer, as there was in Kant, an onto-theological subject that is the source of activity. There is ordering but no orderer. Heidegger calls this new way of being of beings, standing reserve (Bestand). He says:

Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve.

We might simply say that things are being revealed as resources.

Heidegger seems to waver on the question whether, as technicity reaches its final stage, it will accentuate subjects and objects or eliminate them.

The subject-object relation thus reaches, for the first time, its pure "relational," i.e., ordering, character in which both the subject and the object are sucked up as standing-reserves. That does not mean that the subject-object relation vanishes, but rather the opposite: it now attains to its most extreme dominance.

In the end, however, Heidegger seems clearly to hold that technicity can treat people and things as resources to be enhanced without setting meaning-giving subjects over against objectified things. A year after his remark about subjects and objects reaching extreme dominance, Heidegger appears to retract his view about objects at least, in his observation that nature has become "a system of information" and a modern airliner is not an object at all, but just a flexible and efficient cog in the transportation system. Passengers are presumably not autonomous subjects either, but resources recruited by the tourist industry to fill the planes. Heidegger concludes: "Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object."
Foucault, in the social realm, like Heidegger thinking of natural things, went through a stage, expressed in *Madness and Civilization*, where he thought the problem was that some groups dominated and excluded others. He announces dramatically that:

The life of unreason no longer manifests itself except in the lightning-flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, ... of Nietzsche, or of Artaud ... resisting by their own strength that gigantic moral imprisonment which we are in the habit of calling ... the liberation of the insane.\(^{48}\)

Foucault felt he had to expose this sinister repression and liberate the repressed. Later, however, he realized that repression, calling for liberation, was not the problem. He rejected the idea that underneath power with its acts of violence and its artifice we should be able to recuperate things themselves in their primitive vivacity: behind the asylum walls, the spontaneity of madness; through the penal system, the generous fever of delinquence; under the sexual interdiction, the freshness of desire.\(^{49}\)

For Foucault, postmodern power is not an instrument of exclusion, but a pervasive pressure towards ever-greater inclusion. Its disciplinary practices do not serve to objectify, exclude, coerce or punish, but rather to order and enhance life. Power creates docile bodies and self-absorbed, subjects so as to produce ever-greater welfare for all. The resulting practices embody what Foucault calls *bio-power*.

It is a power working to incite, reinforce, ... optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.\(^{50}\)

Foucault, in a variation on Heidegger's account of research, sees that our current practices, supposedly grounded in sciences such as social psychology, produce anomalies, such as delinquents, and then take every anomaly, every attempt to evade them, as an occasion for further intervention to bring the anomalies under scientific norms. All this is done, of course, for the anomaly’s own good, so that, ideally, everyone gladly accepts this intervention. Heidegger emphasized the tendency toward total ordering in technicity by calling it, "total mobilization"; Foucault refers to the totalizing tendency of disciplinary power as "normalization." He speaks of: new methods of power whose operation is not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control?\(^{51}\)

Normalization is, of course, more than socialization into norms. Socialization into norms is the universal way the understanding of being or power governs the actions of the members of any
society. In the new arrangement which has emerged more and more clearly since the Classical Age, however, norms are progressively brought to bear on “all aspects of life.”

52 Apparently, what makes normalization different (and dangerous) for Foucault is that it expands to cover all practices. Similarly, Heidegger, quoting Nietzsche, says, “the wasteland grows.” Both see that there is something new and peculiar about the way, in modernity, individuation and totalizing go hand in hand. Heidegger notes that:

Certain the modern age has … introduced subjectivism and individualism. But it remains just as certain that… in no age before this has the non-individual in the form of the collective, come to acceptance as having worth….It is precisely this reciprocal conditioning of one by the other that points back to events more profound.

And Foucault, after discussing the way pastoral power takes care of each individual, says:

I think that the main characteristic of our political rationality is the fact that this integration of the individuals in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualization and the reinforcement of this totality.”

53

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault explains the way postmodern power is something entirely new. Unlike monarchical power, whose exercise was top-down, centralized, intermittent, highly visible, extravagant, and stable; postmodern power is bottom-up, diffuse, continuous, invisible, operating in the micro-practices, and constantly expanding into new domains. In The History of Sexuality, Vol. I. Foucault adds:

Power's condition of possibility ... must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate ... Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.

54 This raises an puzzling question: When Foucault describes power as "coming from everywhere" is he describing power in general, i.e. the social clearing, or is he describing bio-power, which is uniquely discrete, continuous and bottom-up?

This seeming problem is cleared up, I think, if we remember Heidegger's account of ontotechnology. Like the coordination of practices to produce a style of being, power always, in fact, "comes from everywhere," in that it is embodied in the style of the everyday practices. But what
these background practices have made possible up to recently is monarchical and state-juridical power, i.e. power administered from above. As Foucault puts it:

At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king. Hence the importance that the theory of power gives to the problem of right and violence, law and illegality, freedom and will, and especially the state and sovereignty.55

But now, Foucault tells us, things have changed. Just as for Heidegger technicity, by treating everything as resources, levels being to pure ordering, and so gets rid of onto-theology--the idea that some entity is the ground of everything--so bio-power reveals the irrelevance of questions of the legitimacy of the state as the source of power.

To conceive of power [in these terms] is to conceive of it in terms of a historical form that is characteristic of our societies: the juridical monarchy. Characteristic yet transitory. For while many of its forms have persisted to the present, it has gradually been penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power that are probably irreducible to the representation of law.56

Just as for Heidegger technicity, by treating everything as resources, levels being to pure ordering, and so gets rid of all onto-theology -- the idea that some entity is the ground of everything – so bio-power reveals the irrelevance of questions of the legitimacy of the state as the source of power. And just as, for Heidegger, total mobilization cannot be understood by positing subjects and objects, so normalization bypasses the state and works directly through new sorts of invisible, precise, continuous practices of control Foucault calls micro-practices.

The everyday person to person power relations whose coordination produces the style of any regime of power are, indeed, everywhere. But in earlier regimes of power there were no micro-practices. Only disciplinary power works meticulously by ordering every detail. So, while for Foucault all forms of power are bottom up and the understanding of power as emanating from the sovereign or the state misses this important fact, nonetheless bio-power is bottom-up in a new and dangerously totalizing way, so that understanding power on the model of the power of the king or the state (the equivalent of onto-theology) now covers up an important change in how our practices are working.
We can sum up the many parallels in the structure of Heidegger’ and Foucault’ s thought in a list of the equivalencies between the technical terms each has developed. (My gloss in parentheses.)

**Basic Methodological Terms**

(An understanding of reality in the practices)

- **Being**
- **Power**
  
  (begins with a leap of marginal practices to center)

- **Origin** (Ur-sprung)
- **Emergence** (Entstehung)
  
  (and then is stabilized into a series of disclosive spaces.)

- **Epochs**
- **Regimes**
  
  (which must be described historically in order to free us from our current style.)

- **Recollection**
- **Genealogy**

**The Last Two Stages in the History of Being and Power**

(The Enlightenment/Modernity)

- **Age of the World Picture**
- **Age of Man**
  
  (Post-Modernity)

- **Technicity**
- **Bio-Power**

**How Our Current Stage Works**

(The style of the practices)

- **Challenging Forth**
- **Discipline**
  
  (results in flexible, disaggregated, optimized, things and people)

- **Standing reserve**
- **Docile Bodies**
  
  (making possible the total ordering of everything for the sake of more ordering.)

- **Total Mobilization**
- **Normalization**

V. What Resists and Why.

Heidegger and Foucault are clear, then, that what is uniquely dangerous in our current practices is not that they exploit nature or that they are repressive and/or illegitimate. According to Foucault, our current society becomes more oppressive as it becomes more protective of rights and more permissive, and productive. Heidegger, on his part, distinguishes the current problems of technology--ecological destruction, urbanization, nuclear danger, etc.--from the devastation that would result if technicity enabled us to solve all such problems.
What threatens man in his very nature is the ... view that man, by the peaceful release, transformation, storage, and channeling of the energies of physical nature, could render the human condition, man's being, tolerable for everybody and happy in all respects.\textsuperscript{57}

Heidegger and Foucault also agree that, once we get over onto-theology and cut off the head of the king, a critique of techno/bio-power does not need to lead us to oppose the use of technological devices, nor specific welfare practices. Heidegger is clear that it is the essence of technology (the technological understanding of being, i.e. technicity) not technology that causes our distress. That technicity can be disassociated from technological devices is clear if one looks at contemporary Japan where a traditional, non-technological understanding of being-- or, perhaps better, no single understanding of being at all, but a pluralistic understanding of multiple realities--exists alongside the most advanced high-tech production and consumption.

Heidegger’s goal is to enable us to use technological devices but, by thinking the history of the West, to free ourselves from technicity. He claims:

We can use technical devices as they ought to be used…and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature [as disclosers and preservers of worlds].\textsuperscript{58}

Foucault, like Heidegger, is, of course, not opposed to modern welfare techniques, e.g. specific practices like mass vaccination. Late Foucault even has suggestions on how to improve the welfare state, but he is opposed to taking for granted that welfare practices, based on the social sciences, should, in the name of optimization and order, be extended without critical questioning to all aspects of our lives.

Neither Heidegger nor Foucault thinks that we can resist techno/bio-power directly because what ultimately needs to be resisted is not particular technologies nor particular social strategies but rather a tendency in the practices towards ever greater order and flexibility that produces and sustains them. Thus the current epoch in the history of being, as Heidegger would put it, or our current regime in the history of power, according to Foucault, can only be resisted by first showing that it is not inevitable but is an interpretation of reality, and second by connecting our current style with our current discomfort. Only then will we be motivated to resist by taking up marginal practices that have escaped or successfully resisted the spread of techno/bio-power.

Characteristically, Foucault is concerned solely with the current danger to people, while Heidegger focuses on what is happening to things. Each sees what is endangered as, at the same
time, a source of resistance. Middle Heidegger's basic idea was that the historical essence of Western human beings is that they are essentially world-disclosers. That is, we in the West received our identity in the Fifth Century B.C. when the practices became coordinated in such a way as to produce a single style for all beings. We then became disclosers of a series of total worlds, in a series of reconfiguration in which marginal practices became central and central practices became marginal. Given our need to be disclosers, or at least articulators and preservers of worlds, we can see that for Middle Heidegger the greatest danger is the way Modern world-picturing has worked itself out in technicity as a total mobilization that tends towards the elimination of all marginal practices. All practices that are inflexible and inefficient are either trivialized and rejected or transformed into efficient ones. So, for example, we are led to feel that friendship is old fashioned and an inefficient and that we need to turn to networking, or we tend to think that, when we go backpacking in the wilderness, we are wasting our time unless we do so so as to be more adaptable and efficient when we get back. Thus, according to Heidegger, technicity eliminates the marginal practices on the basis of which new worlds could be disclosed and dooms us to what Nietzsche already saw as the eternal return of the same. On this view, all we can do to resist technicity is preserve the marginal practices and wait for a new cultural paradigm, which Heidegger sometimes calls a new god.

For Later Heidegger, however, there is more we can do. The gathering of local practices around things such as a jug of wine or a family meal produces temporary, self-enclosed, local worlds that resist the totalizing and dispersing effects of the flexible and efficient ordering demanded by technicity. Thus cultivating what Albert Borgmann calls focal practices gives a new center, or better new centers to our lives. Heidegger holds that by “here and now fostering …the saving power [of the] humble things,” human beings can still be world disclosers and preservers, only they would be opening local, temporary worlds rather than a single total one.

It is a striking, surprising, and little noticed fact, that in the late 50ies when Heidegger is writing about things he hardly mentions being at all. Presumably, when he was thinking of modes of resistance to technicity, Heidegger came to see that there was an essential antagonism between a unified understanding of being and local worlds. Of course, he always realized that there would be an antagonism between the style of a whole epoch and things that could only be brought out in their ownness in a style different from the dominant cultural style. Such things would inevitably be dispersed to the margins of the culture. There, they would shine in contrast to the dominant style but would have to resist being considered irrelevant or even wicked. Indeed, if there
is a single understanding of being, even those things that come into their own in the dominant cultural style will be inhibited as centers of local worlds. Already in his “Thing” essay Heidegger goes out of his way to point out that, even though the original meaning of ‘thing’ in German is a gathering to discuss a matter of concern to the community, in the case of the thing setting up a local world, the gathering in question must be self contained. The focal occasion must determine which community concerns are relevant rather than the reverse.  

Given the way local worlds establish their own internal coherence and sense of relevance that resists any imposition from outside, there is bound to be a tension between any glorious cultural paradigm that establishes an understanding of being for a whole culture and the humble inconspicuous things. The shining of the former would wash out the shining of the latter. The tendency toward one unified world would impede the gathering of local worlds. Given this tension, Heidegger abandoned in a late seminar what, in his middle period, he had considered to be his crucial contribution to philosophy, the notion of a single understanding of being and the correlated notion of the ontological difference between being and beings. He remarks that “from the perspective of appropriation it becomes necessary to free thinking from the ontological difference.” He continues, “From the perspective of appropriation, [the gathering that brings things into their own] shows itself as the relation of world and thing, a relation which could in a way be understood as the relation of being and beings. But then its peculiar quality would be lost.” What presumably would be lost would be the self-enclosed local character of the worlds opened by things. It follows that, as disclosers of worlds in the plural, the only comprehensiveness we can hope to achieve is our openness to dwelling in many worlds and the capacity for moving among them. Only such a capacity allows us to see the dangers of technicity and yet have a genuinely positive relationship to it.

Like Heidegger abandoning talking of being, as Foucault works out his final ideas on how to resist biopower, he becomes more interested in saving the self from becoming a subject and less interested in power per se. Thus, in a typical retrospective reinterpretation, he begins his essay, “The Subject and Power” by saying: “I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” The moral seems to be that, when one is looking for marginal practices that could support resistance to a dominant epoch of the understanding of being or a dominant regime of power, rather than thinking of
resistance as the preparation of a new total epoch or regime that is dawning, as both Heidegger and Foucault once did, one should think of the marginal as what resists any unified style of being or power. One will seek to preserve not new forms of being or power but local things and individual selves. Thus in the last works of Heidegger and of Foucault the discussions of epochal understandings of being and regimes of power appropriately disappear.

Foucault, then, bases resistance on the self. He finds in Antiquity a practice in terms of which to question the direction our current practices are taking, and to resist this trend. He explains:

[In Antiquity] it was a matter of knowing how to govern one's own life in order to give it the most beautiful form possible (in the eyes of others, of oneself, and of the future generations for whom one could serve as an example)."66

He proposes "opposing to categories of the ‘law’ and of ‘prohibition’ those of the ‘art of living,’ ‘techniques of self,’ and ‘stylization of existence.’"67 Foucault grounds resistance in these "practices of creativity."68 In the end, he thus embraces a kind of Nietzschean constant overcoming for its own sake. He offers “ a critical philosophy that seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of…transforming ourselves."69 This emphasis on flexibility rather than stability is the sense in which, although the structure of Foucault’s thought is thoroughly Heideggerian, Nietzsche won out in the end.

VI. Conclusion

So now we come to the important difference between Heidegger's and Foucault's ontologies. For Heidegger, the basic way the background practices work is by appropriation, gathering so as to bring things into their own. Human beings, as world disclosers, must respond to and preserve this gathering. For Foucault, on the contrary, the background practices reveal, as they do in Nietzsche, a constantly shifting struggle. Receptivity makes no sense; one must actively engage in the struggle.

Thus, finally, when it comes to the difficult normative question, just why we should resist at all, Heidegger and Foucault take quite different paths, each of which has its advantages and drawbacks. Heidegger, as we have seen, claims that the human essence is to be receptive to the way the background practices gather to disclose new worlds. Foucault explicitly denies any appeal to our human essence--even the weak claim that our essence is to be receivers and preservers of worlds. This saves Foucault from any form of essentialism but, of course, denies him any account of why bio-power should generally be felt as distressing. So, in contrast to Heidegger, he holds that
human beings must resist the current form of power without being able to give an argument why
totalization is especially dangerous. Since Foucault holds that no form of power is without its
problems, he adopts an attitude he calls “hyper- and pessimistic activism.”

There is, nonetheless, an important kind of resistance these two thinkers share. Thinking the
history of being, for Heidegger, and the genealogy of regimes of power, for Foucault, opens a
space for critical questioning by showing that our understanding of reality need not be defined by
 techno/bio power--that we need not be dominated by the drive to order and optimize everything.
Thus an understanding of our historical condition weakens the hold our current understanding has
on us and makes possible disengagement from the direction our practices are taking. Both thinkers
were once prophets of the dawning of a new world, but both gave up that stance. They both came
to share later Heidegger’s modest claim that:

The thinking in question remains unassuming because its task is only of a
preparatory, not of a founding character. It is content with awakening a readiness in
man for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains
uncertain.

Thinking must first learn what remains reserved and in store for thinking to get
involved in. It prepares its own transformation in this learning.71

Or, as Foucault put it in an interview:

My role ... is to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people
accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain
moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and
destroyed.72

He wanted, he said, ”to participate in the difficult displacement of forms of sensibility.”73

Thus both thinkers emphasize the thinker’s ability to enable us to think differently and
thereby to get into a free relationship to what both regard as the unique danger posed by our current
practices.

[Add that Foucault doesn’t write about Heidegger because he thinks in terms of him.]
1 “For Heidegger, it was through an increasing obsession with techné as the only way to arrive at an understanding of objects that the West lost touch with Being. Let’s turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject.” Ed. Jeremy R. Carrette, Religion and Culture Michel Foucault, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 161.

2 Michel Foucault, "Final Interview", Raritan, (summer 1985): 8. 'Le Retour de la morale', interview conducted by Gilles Barbadette, Les Nouvelles, (June 28, 1984). The full quotation reads as follows:

Heidegger has always been for me the essential philosopher. I started by reading Hegel, then Marx, and I began to read Heidegger in 1951 or 1952; then in 1952 or 1953, I no longer remember, I read Nietzsche. I still have the notes I took while reading Heidegger--I have tons of them!--and they are far more important than the ones I took on Hegel or Marx. My whole philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger. But I recognize that Nietzsche prevailed over him. I don't know Heidegger well enough: I practically don't know Being and Time nor the things recently published. My knowledge of Nietzsche is much greater. Nevertheless, these were my two fundamental experiences. I probably wouldn't have read Nietzsche if I hadn't read Heidegger. I tried to read Nietzsche in the fifties, but Nietzsche by himself said nothing to me. Whereas Nietzsche and Heidegger--that was the philosophical shock! But I've never written anything on Heidegger and only a very short article on Nietzsche. I think it's important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn't write. Perhaps someday I'll write about them, but at that point they will no longer be instruments of thought for me.

In case, for any reason, this last interview be considered unreliable, there are other scattered references to Heidegger in the interviews and lectures that make the same point. For example, in “Truth, Power, Self: An Interview” in Technologies of the Self, eds Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton, (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 12, when asked about the intellectual influences on his thought, Foucault says, “I was surprised when two of my friends in Berkeley wrote something about me and said that Heidegger was influential. Of course, it was quite true, but no one in France has ever perceived it.” And there is Foucault's appraisal of Heidegger
as “the kind [of philosopher] who opens up new avenues of thought.” (Carrette, *Religion and Culture* Michel Foucault, 86).

Many, although not all, my revisions of my original Being and Power paper are implicit answers to Paul Rabinow’s rather indirect objections to my thesis that we can learn a great deal about these two thinkers by working out the structural parallels in their thinking. (See Paul Rabinow, “Modern and countermorden: Ethos and epoch in Heidegger and Foucault,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Garry Gutting, (Cambridge University Press, 1994).


9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.


12 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 222-3.


14 Ibid. 76.
16 Ibid. 77-78.
17 Ibid. 78.
19 Ibid. 135.
21 Ibid. 84.
22 Ibid. 86.
24 Ibid. 95.
25 Ibid. 84-85.
27 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, 78.
32 Ibid. 131-32.
33 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 312.
34 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", 133.
35 Ibid.
36 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.
Ibid. 16. My italics.

Ibid. 15.


Ibid. 17.

Ibid.


Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Volume I, 136.

Ibid. 89.

Ibid. 31


Ibid. 93.

Ibid. 88-9.

Ibid. 89.

Martin Heidegger, "What Are Poets for?,” 116.

Martin Heidegger, “Memorial Address”, 54.


With one single exception that I know of, where, when he is speaking of mortals, Heidegger reverts to the language of Being and Time.

in from outside almost ruin Mrs. Ramsey’s dinner. The dinner only works when the participants become so absorbed in the food that they stop paying attention to external concerns and get in tune with the actual occasion. The same thing happens in the film *Babette’s Feast*. The members of an ascetic religious community go into the feast resolved to be true to their dead founder’s principles and not to enjoy the food. Bickering and silence ensues until the wine and food makes them forget their founder’s concerns and attunes them to the past and present relationships that are in accord with the gathering.

65 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 208.
67 Ibid.
69 Michel Foucault “About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self”, (1980), in *Religion and Culture Michel Foucault*, 161.
70 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, 232.