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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

MASTER OF ARTS-PHILOSOPHY

SEMESTER -III

POST MODERNISM

OPEN ELECTIVE 305

BLOCK-2

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

Postal Address:

The Registrar,

University of North Bengal,

Raja Rammohunpur,

P.O.-N.B.U., Dist-Darjeeling,

West Bengal, Pin-734013,

India.

Phone: (O) +91 0353-2776331/2699008

Fax: (0353) 2776313, 2699001

Email: regnbu@sancharnet.in ; regnbu@nbu.ac.in

Wesbsite: www.nbu.ac.in

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FOREWORD

The Self Learning Material (SLM) is written with the aim of providing simple and organized study content to all the learners. The SLMs are prepared on the framework of being mutually cohesive, internally consistent and structured as per the university's syllabi. It is a humble attempt to give glimpses of the various approaches and dimensions to the topic of study and to kindle the learner's interest to the subject

We have tried to put together information from various sources into this book that has been written in an engaging style with interesting and relevant examples. It introduces you to the insights of subject concepts and theories and presents them in a way that is easy to understand and comprehend.

We always believe in continuous improvement and would periodically update the content in the very interest of the learners. It may be added that despite enormous efforts and coordination, there is every possibility for some omission or inadequacy in few areas or topics, which would definitely be rectified in future.

We hope you enjoy learning from this book and the experience truly enrich your learning and help you to advance in your career and future endeavours.

POST MODARNISM

BLOCK-1

Unit 1: Theories of Modernisation and Modernity

Unit 2: Tradition and Modernity

Unit 3: Postmodernism

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BLOCK 2 : POST MODARNISM

Introduction to the Block

Unit 8 deals with Re-Assesing Deconstruction. At the end of this introductory survey of the theory, implications and applications of deconstruction, let us pause for a moment to re-assess what we have read so far and try to see why this theory emerged and critique the parameters within which it functions.

Unit 9 deals with Michel Foucault. Appreciate the significance of Michel Foucault's work within the context of contemporary Western thought.

Unit 10 deals with Genealogy, Discourse, and Archelogy: Power and knowledge. For many years now historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances

Unit 11 deals with Philosophy of Gender and discuss the major currents of thinking in sociology like the positivist tradition and interpretative thinking

Unit 12 deals with Post colonialism and we shall give you some idea of the wide field known as Postcolonial Theory; (in some cases 'colonial discourse analysis'; but the former term is more inclusive). Three key notions will be taken up by us.

Unit 13 deals with Post-colonialism and gender. Feminist theory consists of several strands which include formative feminisms, multicultural feminism, feminism and history, postcolonial feminism, third world feminism, transnational feminism or global feminism, eco-feminism, and black feminism.

Unit 14 deals with Postmodern ethics means Ethics is the philosophical treatise which studies human behaviour and tries to determine what is right or wrong behaviour. It is also called moral philosophy. (from the Greek 'ethos' and the Latin 'mores' which mean 'custom', 'ways of behaviour', 'human character').

UNIT 8: RE-ASSESSING DECONSTRUCTION

STRUCTURE

8.0 Objectives

8.1 Introduction

8.2 The Turn Towards Language

8.2.1 Positioning Structuralism

8.2.2 Positioning Poststructuralism

8.3 Deconstructing Deconstruction

8.4 Some Important Problems

8.4.1 The Problem of Responsibility

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8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this introductory survey of the theory, implications and applications of deconstruction, let us pause for a moment to re-assess what we have read so far and try to see why this theory emerged and critique the parameters within which it functions. It is especially necessary to do so in the case of deconstruction because left to it, the theory sounds all-encompassing, and can lead us to the view that all meaning and interpretation are futile activities. Just as it is important to understand what is useful in deconstruction, similarly, it is also important to understand where the theory falters and why. It is with this aim in mind that the last Unit has been conceived and written.

- The Turn Towards Language
- Deconstructing Deconstruction
- Some Important Problems
- The Rise of New Historicism and Cultural Critique

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Deconstruction as a theoretical movement falls under the broad category poststructuralism. Therefore, in order to assess deconstruction properly we should first be clear about poststructuralism. Poststructuralism as a movement comes forward ideas from Structuralism at the same time as breaks hay from it. Language appears to be at the heart of both. Therefore, our initial thrust is going to be an understanding of the special status accorded to language in critical thought in the second half of the twentieth century. We will then move on to examine the socio-political conditions under which poststructuralism emerged. Having done so, we will begin our re-assessment by turning deconstruction against itself. Following this, we will highlight some important problems associated with this theory and finally show how the problems prepared the grounds for its displacement by other theories.

Intellectual Background

We begin, however, with a sketch of the philosophical environment in which Foucault was educated. He entered the École Normale Supérieure (the standard launching pad for major French philosophers) in 1946, during the heyday of existential phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty, whose lectures he attended, and Heidegger were particularly important. Hegel and Marx were also major interests, Hegel through the interpretation of his work offered by Jean Hyppolite and Marx through the structuralist reading of Louis Althusser—both teachers who had a strong impact on Foucault at the École Normale. It is not surprising that Foucault's earliest works (his long "Introduction" to Jacqueline Verdeaux' French translation of Traum und Existenz by Ludwig Binswanger, a Heideggerian psychiatrist, and Maladie mentale et personnalité, a short

book on mental illness) were written in the grip of, respectively, existentialism and Marxism. But he soon turned away from both.

Jean-Paul Sartre, working outside the University system, had no personal influence on Foucault. But, as the French master-thinker of the previous generation, he is always in the background. Like Sartre, Foucault began from a relentless hatred of bourgeois society and culture and with a spontaneous sympathy for marginal groups such as the mad, homosexuals, and prisoners. They both also had strong interests in literature and psychology as well as philosophy, and both, after an early relative lack of political interest, became committed activists. But in the end, Foucault seemed to insist on defining himself in contradiction to Sartre. Philosophically, he rejected what he saw as Sartre's privileging of the subject (which he mocked as "transcendental narcissism"). Personally and politically, he rejected Sartre's role as what Foucault called a "universal intellectual", judging society by appeals to universal moral principles, such as the inviolability of individual freedom. There is, however, more than a hint of protesting too much in Foucault's rejection of Sartre, and the question of the relation of their work remains a fertile one.

Three other factors were of much more positive significance for the young Foucault. First, there was the French tradition of history and philosophy of science, particularly as represented by Georges Canguilhem, a powerful figure in the French University establishment, whose work in the history and philosophy of biology provided a model for much of Foucault's work in the history of the human sciences. Canguilhem sponsored Foucault's doctoral thesis on the history of madness and, throughout Foucault's career, remained one of his most important and effective supporters. Canguilhem's approach to the history of science (an approach developed from the work of Gaston Bachelard), provided Foucault with a strong sense of the discontinuities in scientific history, along with a "rationalist" understanding of the historical role of concepts that made them independent of the phenomenologists' transcendental consciousness. Foucault found this understanding

reinforced in the structuralist linguistics and psychology developed, respectively, by Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Lacan, as well as in Georges Dumézil's proto-structuralist work on comparative religion. These anti-subjective standpoints provide the context for Foucault's marginalization of the subject in his "structuralist histories", The Birth of the Clinic (on the origins of modern medicine) and The Order of Things (on the origins of the modern human sciences).

In a quite different vein, Foucault was enthralled by French avant-garde literature, especially the writings of Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, where he found the experiential concreteness of existential phenomenology without what he came to see as dubious philosophical assumptions about subjectivity. Of particular interest was this literature's evocation of "limit-experiences", which push us to extremes where conventional categories of intelligibility begin to break down.

This philosophical milieu provided materials for the critique of subjectivity and the corresponding "archaeological" and "genealogical" methods of writing history that inform Foucault's projects of historical critique, to which we now turn.

Major Works

Since its beginnings with Socrates, philosophy has typically involved the project of questioning the accepted knowledge of the day. Later, Locke, Hume, and especially, Kant developed a distinctively modern idea of philosophy as the critique of knowledge. Kant's great epistemological innovation was to maintain that the same critique that revealed the limits of our knowing powers could also reveal necessary conditions for their exercise. What might have seemed just contingent features of human cognition (for example, the spatial and temporal character of its perceptual objects) turn out to be necessary truths. Foucault, however, suggests the need to invert this Kantian move. Rather than asking what, in the apparently contingent, is actually necessary, he suggests asking what, in the apparently necessary, might be contingent. The focus of his

questioning is the modern human sciences (biological, psychological, social). These purport to offer universal scientific truths about human nature that are, in fact, often mere expressions of ethical and political commitments of a particular society. Foucault's "critical philosophy" undermines such claims by exhibiting how they are the outcome of contingent historical forces, not scientifically grounded truths. Each of his major books is a critique of historical reason.

Histories of Madness and Medicine

Foucault's History of Madness in the Classical Age (1961) originated in his academic study of psychology (a licence de psychologie in 1949 and a diplome de psycho-pathologie in 1952), his work in a Parisian mental hospital, and his own personal psychological problems. It was mainly written during his post-graduate Wanderjahren (1955–59) through a succession of diplomatic/educational posts in Sweden, Germany, and Poland. A study of the emergence of the modern concept of "mental illness" in Europe, History of Madness is formed from both Foucault's extensive archival work and his intense anger at what he saw as the moral hypocrisy of modern psychiatry. Standard histories saw the nineteenth-century medical treatment of madness (developed from the reforms of Pinel in France and the Tuke brothers in England) as an enlightened liberation of the mad from the ignorance and brutality of preceding ages. But, according to Foucault, the new idea that the mad were merely sick ("mentally" ill) and in need of medical treatment was not at all a clear improvement on earlier conceptions (e.g., the Renaissance idea that the mad were in contact with the mysterious forces of cosmic tragedy or the seventeenth-eighteenth-century view of madness as a renouncing of reason). Moreover, he argued that the alleged scientific neutrality of modern medical treatments of insanity are in fact covers for controlling challenges to conventional bourgeois morality. In short, Foucault argued that what was presented as an objective, incontrovertible scientific discovery (that madness is mental illness) was in fact the product of eminently questionable social and ethical commitments.

Foucault's next history, The Birth of the Clinic (1963) also presents a critique of modern clinical medicine. But the socio-ethical critique is muted (except for a few vehement passages), presumably because there is a substantial core of objective truth in medicine (as opposed to psychiatry) and so less basis for criticism. As a result The Birth of the Clinic is much closer to a standard history of science, in the tradition of Canguilhem's history of concepts.

The Order of Things

The book that made Foucault famous, Les mots et les choses (translated into English under the title The Order of Things), is in many ways an odd interpolation into the development of his thought. Its subtitle, "An Archaeology of the Human Sciences", suggests an expansion of the earlier critical histories of psychiatry and clinical medicine into other modern disciplines such as economics, biology, and philology. And indeed there is an extensive account of the various "empirical disciplines" of the Renaissance and the Classical Age that precede these modern human sciences. But there is little or nothing of the implicit social critique found in the History of Madness or even The Birth of the Clinic. Instead, Foucault offers an analysis of what knowledge meant—and how this meaning changed—in Western thought from the Renaissance to the present. At the heart of his account is the notion of representation. Here we focus on his treatment of representation in philosophical thought, where we find Foucault's most direct engagement with traditional philosophical questions.

Classical Representation

Foucault argues that from Descartes up to Kant (during what he calls the Classical Age) representation was simply assimilated to thought: to think just was to employ ideas to represent the object of thought. But, he says, we need to be clear about what it meant for an idea to represent an object. This was not, first of all, any sort of relation of resemblance: there

were no features (properties) of the idea that themselves constituted the representation of the object. (Saying this, however, does not require that the idea itself have no properties or even that these properties are not relevant to the idea's representation of the object.) By contrast, during the Renaissance, knowledge was understood as a matter of resemblance between things.

The map is a useful model of Classical representation. It consists, for example, of a set of lines of varying widths, lengths, and colors, and thereby represents the roads in and around a city. This is not because the roads have the properties of the map (the widths, lengths, and colors of the lines) but because the abstract structure given in the map (the relations among the lines) duplicates the abstract structure of the roads. At the heart of Classical thought is the principle that we know in virtue of having ideas that, in this sense, represent what we know. Of course, in contrast to the map, we do not need to know what the actual features of our ideas are in virtue of which they are able to represent. (In Descartes' scholastic terminology, we do not need to know their "formal reality".) We need to know only the abstract structure that they share with the things they represent (the structure of what Descartes calls their "objective reality"). We do, however, have direct (introspective) access to the abstract structures of our ideas: we can "see" what representational structure they have. Further, we can alter an idea's structure to make it a better representation of an object, as we can alter a map to improve it.

How, on the Classical view, do we know that an idea is a representation of an object—and an adequate representation? Not, Foucault argues, by comparing the idea with the object as it is apart from its representation. This is impossible, since it would require knowing the object without a representation (when, for Classical thought, to know is to represent). The only possibility is that the idea itself must make it apparent that it is a representation. The idea represents the very fact that it is a representation. As to the question of whether an idea is a representation, this "self-referential" feature is all there is to it. As to adequacy, it must be that some subset of ideas likewise bear witness to their own

adequacy—as, for example, Descartes' "clear and distinct perceptions" or Hume's simple impressions. In this sense, early modern philosophy is based on "intuition" (intellectual or sensory). Note, however, that an "intuition" of an idea's adequacy does not, of itself, establish the independent existence of the object represented by the idea. As far as the early modern view is concerned, there may be no such objects; or, if there are, this needs to be established by some other means (e.g., an argument or some other sort of intuition).

We see, then, that for Foucault the key to Classical knowing is the idea, that is, mental representation. Classical thinkers might disagree about the actual ontological status of ideas (their formal reality); but they all agreed that as representations (epistemically, if not ontologically) they were "non-physical" and "non-historical"; that is, precisely as representing their objects, they could not be conceived as having any role in the causal networks of the natural or the human worlds. From this it further followed that language—precisely as a physical and/or historical reality—could have no fundamental role in knowledge. Language could be nothing more than a higher-order instrument of thought: a physical representation of ideas, having no meaning except in relation to them.

Kant's Critique of Classical Representation

Foucault maintains that the great "turn" in modern philosophy occurs with Kant (though presumably he is merely an example of something much broader and deeper). Kant raises the question of whether ideas do in fact represent their objects and, if so, how (in virtue of what) they do so. In other words, ideas are no longer taken as the unproblematic vehicles of knowledge; it is now possible to think that knowledge might be (or have roots in) something other than representation. This did not mean that representation had nothing at all to do with knowledge. Perhaps some (or even all) knowledge still essentially involved ideas' representing objects. But, Foucault insists, the thought that was only now (with Kant) possible was that representation itself (and the ideas that represented) could have an origin in something other than representation.

This thought, according to Foucault, led to some important and distinctively modern possibilities. The first was developed by Kant himself, who thought that representations (thoughts or ideas) were themselves the product of ("constituted" by) the mind. Not, however, produced by the mind as a natural or historical reality, but as belonging to a special epistemic realm: transcendental subjectivity. Kant thus maintained the Classical view that knowledge cannot be understood as a physical or historical reality, but he located the grounds of knowledge in a domain (the transcendental) more fundamental than the ideas it subtended. We must add, of course, that Kant also did not think of this domain as possessing a reality beyond the historical and the physical; it was not metaphysical. But this metaphysical alternative was explored by the idealistic metaphysics that followed Kant. Another—and in some ways more typically modern—view was that ideas were themselves historical realities. This could be most plausibly developed, as Herder did, by tying ideas essentially to language, now regarded as the primary (and historicized) vehicle of knowledge. But such an approach was not viable in its pure form, since to make knowledge entirely historical would deprive it of any normative character and so destroy its character as knowledge. In other words, even when modern thought made knowledge essentially historical, it had to retain some functional equivalent of Kant's transcendental realm to guarantee the normative validity of knowledge.

Language and "Man"

At this point, The Order of Things introduces the two central features of thought after Kant: the return of language and the "birth of man". Our discussion above readily explains why Foucault talks of a return of language: it now has an independent and essential role that it did not have in the Classical view. But the return is not a monolithic phenomenon. Language is related to knowledge in diverse ways, each of which corresponds a distinctive sort of "return". So, for example, the history of natural languages has introduced confusions and distortions

that we can try to eliminate through techniques of formalization. On the other hand, this same history may have deposited fundamental truths in our languages that we can unearth only by the methods of hermeneutic interpretation. (So these two apparently opposed approaches—underlying the division of analytic and continental philosophy—are in fact, according to Foucault, complementary projects of modern thought.) But there is yet another possibility: freed from its subordination to ideas, language can function (as in the Renaissance) as an autonomous reality—indeed as even more deeply autonomous than Renaissance language, since there is no system of resemblances binding it to the world. Even more, Foucault suggests, language is a truth unto itself, speaking nothing other than its own meaning. This is the realm of "pure literature", evoked by Mallarmé when he answered Nietzsche's (genealogical) question, "Who is speaking?" with, "Language itself". In contrast to the Renaissance, however, there is no divine Word underlying and giving unique truth to the words of language. Literature is literally nothing but language—or rather many languages, speaking for and of themselves.

Even more important than language is the figure of man. The most important point about "man" is that it is an epistemological concept. Man, Foucault says, did not exist during the Classical age (or before). This is not because there was no idea of human beings as a species or of human nature as a psychological, moral, or political reality. Rather, "there was no epistemological consciousness of man as such" (The Order of Things, [1973: 309]). But even "epistemological" needs construal. There is no doubt that even in the Classical age human beings were conceived as the locus of knowledge (since humans possess the ideas that represent the world). The notion of man, on the other hand, is epistemological in the Kantian sense of a transcendental subject that is also an empirical object. For the Classical age, human beings are the locus of representations but not, as for Kant, their source. There is, in Classical thought, no room for the modern notion of "constitution".

Foucault illustrates his point through a striking discussion of Descartes' cogito, showing why it is an indubitable certitude within the classical episteme, but not within the modern episteme. There are two ways of questioning the force of the cogito. One is to suggest that the subject (the thinking self, the I) that Descartes concludes necessarily exists in the act of thinking is something more than just the act of representing objects; so we can't go from representation to a thinker. But for the Classical Age this makes no sense, since thinking is representation. A second criticism would be that the self as representer may not be "really real" but merely the "product of" (constituted by) a mind that is real in a fuller sense. But this objection has weight only if we can think of this "more real" mind as having the self as an object in some sense other than representing it. (Otherwise, there is no basis for saying that the self as representer is "less real".) But, once again, this is precisely what cannot be thought in Classical terms.

The Analytic of Finitude

At the very heart of man is his finitude: the fact that, as described by the modern empirical sciences, he is limited by the various historical forces (organic, economic, linguistic) operating on him. This finitude is a philosophical problem because man as a historically limited empirical being must somehow also be the source of the representations whereby we know the empirical world, including ourselves as empirical beings. I (my consciousness) must, as Kant put it, be both an empirical object of representation and the transcendental source of representations. How is this possible? Foucault's view is that, in the end, it isn't—and that the impossibility (historically realized) means the collapse of the modern episteme. What Foucault calls the "analytic of finitude" sketches the historical case for this conclusion, examining the major efforts (together making up the heart of modern philosophy) to understand man as "empirico-transcendental".

The question—and the basic strategy for answering it—go back, of course, to Kant, who put forward the following crucial idea: that the very

factors that make us finite (our subjection to space, time, causality, etc.) are also conditions necessary for the possibility of empirical knowledge. Our finitude is, therefore, simultaneously founded and founding (positive and fundamental, as Foucault puts it). The project of modern (Kantian and post-Kantian) philosophy—the analytic of finitude—is to show how this is possible.

Some modern philosophy tries to resolve the problem of man by, in effect, reducing the transcendental to the empirical. For example, naturalism attempts to explain knowledge in terms of natural science (physics, biology), while Marxism appeals to historical social sciences. (The difference is that the first grounds knowledge in the past—e.g., an evolutionary history—whereas the second grounds it in a revolutionary future that will transcend the limitations of ideology.) Either approach simply ignores the terms of the problem: that man must be regarded as irreducibly both empirical and transcendental.

It might seem that Husserl's phenomenology has carried out the Kantian project of synthesizing man as object and man as subject by radicalizing the Cartesian project; that is, by grounding our knowledge of empirical truths in the transcendental subject. The problem, however, is that, as Foucault sees it, the modern notion of man excludes Descartes' idea of the cogito as a "sovereign transparency" of pure consciousness. Thought is no longer pure representation and therefore cannot be separated from an "unthought" (i.e., the given empirical and historical truths about who we are). I can no longer go from "I think" to "I am" because the content of my reality (what I am) is always more than the content of any merely thinking self (I am, e.g., living, working, and speaking—and all these take me beyond the realm of mere thought). Or, conversely, if we use "I" to denote me simply as a conscious being, then I "am not" much of what I (as a self in the world) am. As a result, to the extent that Husserl has grounded everything in the transcendental subject, this is not the subject (cogito) of Descartes but the modern cogito, which includes the (empirical) unthought. Phenomenology, like all modern thought, must accept the unthought as the ineliminable "other" of man. Nor are the

existential phenomenologists (Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) able to solve the problem. Unlike Husserl, they avoid positing a transcendental ego and instead focus on the concrete reality of man-in-the world. But this, Foucault claims, is just a more subtle way of reducing the transcendental to the empirical.

Finally, some philosophers (Hegel and Marx in one way, Nietzsche and Heidegger in another) have tried to resolve the problem of man's dual status by treating him as a historical reality. But this move encounters the difficulty that man has to be both a product of historical processes and the origin of history. If we treat man as a product, we find ourselves reducing his reality to something non-human (this is what Foucault calls the "retreat" from man's origin). But if we insist on a "return" to man as his own proper origin, then we can no longer make sense of his place in the empirical world. This paradox may explain the endless modern obsession with origins, but there is never any way out of the contradiction between man as originator and man as originated. Nonetheless, Foucault thinks that the modern pursuit of the question of origins has provided us with a deeper sense of the ontological significance of time, particularly in the thought of Nietzsche and Heidegger, who reject Hegel's and Marx's view of the return to our origin as a redemptive fullness of being, and instead see it as a confrontation with the nothingness of our existence.

8.2 THE TURN TOWARDS LANGUAGE

As students of literature, if you recall the late Modem period in Western Europe, you will find that expression and its primary tool, language are at a crisis. Broadly speaking, the crisis had three significant dimensions:

(a) The communicative function of language had come under question. It was no longer possible to share the rationalist or empiricist trust of the great 19th century middle-class that language did hook itself on to the world.

(b) The emerging industrial society had reduced most utterances in language to mere instruments of science, commerce, advertising and the bureaucracy.

(c) An author could no longer presume that she shared with herhis audience a framework of collective beliefs which a writing could evoke, question and /or advance. In fact, such a framework had already been lost and it was being questioned if in the ideological turmoil of the twentieth century, such a shared framework could possibly be re-invented? Right from Coleridge to Forster and Beckett, most Modem authors are struggling with some or all of these questions. It was questions such as these, rooted in the real historical conditions of the Modem era, which foregrounded the problem of language so dramatically. The Formalist and Structuralist preoccupation with language can be understood as an effort to restore to an alienated language the richness it had been robbed of. But it was also possible to set up language itself as an alternative to the social problems one encountered-to denounce gloomily or triumphantly, the traditional notion that one wrote about something or for somebody and to make language itself one's cherished object. In his masterly early essay Writing Degree Zero (1953), Barthes maps some of the historical developments by which writing for the French 19'-century Symbolist poets became an "intransitive" act : not writing for a particular purpose, or a specific topic, as in the age of "classical" literature, but writing as ai; end and passion in itself. Writing , thus, turns in on itself in a profound act of narcissism but always troubled and overshadowed by the social guilt of its own uselessness. Unavoidably complicit with those who have reduced it to an unwanted commodity, it strains to free itself from the contamination of social meaning, either by pressing towards the purity of silence as with the Symbolists or by seeking an austere neutrality, which would hope to appear innocent but which in reality turns out to be a literary style.

8.2.1 Positioning Structuralism

Structuralism is best seen as both a symptom of and reaction to the social and linguistic crisis outlined earlier. It escapes from investigating the

socio-political implications of the referential function of language to investigating its structure. This is an ironic act, since as Barthes shows, few moves could be more socio-politically significant in the sense of asserting that crisis, and showing the structuarlist's inability to engage with it. But, this is not an empty escape in holding society and politics at bay, Structuralism focuses exclusively on the linguistic system and initiates an intensive investigation of the common signs we use in our day-to-day life. It alerts us to their property to change with time and also tries to explain the dynamics of the structure within which this change tak s place.

8.2.2 Positioning Poststructuralism

Just when Structuralism was at its zenith, something of great significance occurred in the history of Western Europe. In 1968, a student movement swept across Europe, striking against the authoritarianism of the educational institutions and, in France combining with the workers to briefly threaten the capitalist state itself. For a dramatic moment, the state teetered on the brink of ruin: its police and army fought on the streets with students who were struggling to forge solidarity with the working class. However, in the absence of a coherent political leadership, the movement plunged into a confused melee of socialism and anarchy. No wonder it was rolled back and finally dissipated-betrayed by its supine Stalinist leaders and the inability of the working cbs to assume power. "Poststructuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and anticipation, carnival and catastrophe that was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, Poststructuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language" writes Teny Eagleton. Nobody at least was likely to beat the revolutionaries over the head for doing so. The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse. Its enemies, as for the later Barthes, were coherent belief systems of any kind-in particular all forms of political theory and organization, which sought to analyze, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole. What was operative in the 1968 Paris was a political system of this

kind4or the leaders of the movement attempted to unite and lead all the oppreised sections of the society but failed : the oppressing system proved too powerful for them. All such total and systematic thought was now suspect as terroristic and that is why poststruoturalism turned against structuralism with a certain vehemence. What they saw in structuralism was not its ahistoric stance but the very idea-of structure itself-its claim of being 'total and systematic'. Structuralism, by 'refbsing to acknowledge the limiting1 controlling role of the centre in founding a system suggested a totality in approach that the poststructuralists attacked relentlessly. So, in the works of Demda and others we find a grave doubt cast upon classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge, all of which could be exposed as structured systematically around a centre. Unable to break the 'total structure' of late monopoly capitalism and other coherent systems that pretended to confront it, thinkers within poststructuralism trained their guns on other established monoliths like truth, reality, meaning and knowledge.

8.3 DECONSTRUCTING DECONSTRUCTION

As a part of this project, let us go back to an actual deconstruction conducted by Demda - say the deconstruction of Saussure's theory of language. So, take a quick look at what you read in Unit 2, specially the quotation from Demda where he reveals Saussure's theory of language as logocentric and contaminated by the metaphysics of presence. Agreeing with Saussure on the essentially differential nature of all meaning, Demda goes on to point out that despite Saussure's insistence on the purely differential nature of the sign, Saussure maintains a rigorous distinction: between the signifier and the signified and the equation between the signified and the concept leaves open in principle the possibility of conceiving a signified concept in itself. The signifier exists, [De~da continues], to give ' access to the signified and seems subordinated to the concept of meaning that it communicates. SO, Saussum's theory is shown as making a neat distinction between the signifier and the signified and arranging them in an: signified signifier. This as Demda shows later is a fallace signified cannot be conceived

independently of the signifies. The only concrete entities in terms of which we can talk about signified are the signifiers themselves. Thus, he reverses the hierarchy in Saussure's theory and shows the theory to be contaminated with the traditional notion of presence.

Then what is the linguistic model according to Derrida? Instead of Saussure's signified, Derrida would start with the written letter: marks-on-blanks, as the basic unit---the a priori given. Everything else he would see as imported from outside or generated in a reader's interaction with these mark. "Ultimately man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them "says one of his dedicated followers, J.H. Miller. So, just as Saussure's model of language takes a certain signified presence as its starting point and is thus labeled logocentric, similarly, Derrida's model which takes the written sign for granted, can be labeled 'graph centric'--centred on the marks- I on-blanks. These marks would through a process of difference produce meaning. As the process of signification continues over years, these marks accumulate "traces" of meanings. Any signification that difference has activated in a signifier in the past remains active as a "trace" in the present instance as it will in the future, and these traces accumulate like sediments giving the meaning of that word diversity. Thus, whenever we try to ascertain the meaning of a word, Miller would have us believe; we encounter a number of meanings present in a state of "vibratory suspension", which will not permit us to accept any one meaning as the only meaning of the word. But what sets this process of difference into motion? If a human mind learning language starts with these marks-on-blanks, then, what sets into motion the system of differentiation through which at least a couple of meanings are created which can then through mutual differentiation inbreed other meanings and create a complete I , system? This is one of the basic questions about language, which the deconstructionist cannot satisfactorily answer without committing a heresy. In order to answer it, Derrida offers the notion of difference.

Combining the ideas 'difference-differing-deference' difference denotes both a 'passive' difference already in place as the condition of

signification and an act of differing which produces other differences. How does that passive difference arise in the first place? , To answer this Derrida would ask us to believe in an impossible process in which difference originates in the process of differing without the differing terms having - any kind of a priori signification. All this adds up to say that just as Saussure's theory is based on the logocentric model, similarly Derrida's theory of difference is based on the graph centric model. Derrida's deconstruction of Saussurean linguistics is also dependent on an origin, ground and end. His origin and end are his graph centric premises and the impossible notion of difference in which he sees the origin of meaning.

To say that Derrida's critique of Saussure harbours the same limitations is nothing new. If you remember the point where we defined deconstruction, we stressed that; deconstruction critiques a fallacy even while harbouring the same fallacy itself. Then, why should anyone read deconstruction seriously if it remains a fault-finding exercise without suggesting any positive remedy? If you continue reading the same section, you will find a good reason for indulging in this fault-finding exercise. However, for the moment let us move on to other problems, which this theory generates for a lay reader.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Turn Towards Language.

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2. Discuss Deconstructing Deconstruction.

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8.4 SOME IMPORTANT PROBLEMS

8.4.1 The Problem Of Responsibility

One of the major problems associated with this theory, hinted at earlier, is that it gives its practitioners a fairly wide scope to operate but does not fix any real responsibilities on them. One of the ideas central to deconstruction is that there can be no truth claims in linguistic utterances because language is a specially problematic medium yielding only indeterminate meanings. Think about this carefully and you will realize that this theoretically sound view is simultaneously very mischievous. It allows you to ride rough shod over everybody else's beliefs without having the inconvenience of having to adopt one yourself. The view that the most significant aspect of any piece of language is that it does not know what it is talking about smacks of resignation to the impossibility of truth. But it also frees you in one stroke from having to assume a position on important issues, since what you say of such things will be no more than a play of signifiers, and so, in no sense to be taken as true or serious. This stance is mischievously radical in respect of everyone else's opinions, able to unmask the most solemn declarations as mere play of signs, while it implicitly arrests that play in conveying the strategy and result of the unmasking. In other words, deconstruction is blind to its own vulnerability as a critical practice.

8.4.2 The Problem Of Practical Experience

One of the fundamental problems we face iq accepting this theory of language is that it goes so much against our day-to-day experience. If we

live in a world where things do mean, and communication does take place, then where have we got this theory wrong - or where has this theory gone wrong. For Denida would have us believe that meaning is uncertain and unstable, "Half there-half not there". In that case how do we interpret and understand the world and communicate it to others? The difficulty here is of reconciling the opinion of a seasoned deconstructionist like Miller who feels that a word or a passage is "indeterminable", "undecipherable", "unreadable", with a humanistic opinion like Abrarns' who believes that authors exploit "the possibilities and norms of their inherited language to say something determinate and.. . [assume] that competent readers insofar as they share their own linguistic skills, would be able to understand [approximately] what. . . [they] said ". One way of understanding and reconciling the deconstructionist's claim of indeterminacy with the humanist's one of relative determinacy is to point out two limitations in deconstruction: (a) the lack of a practical perspective and (b) the generalizing sweep about all linguistic utterances. The deconstructionist indulges in both these limitations with scant respect to the origin, nature and performance of language as a practical institution. Let us take the first charge first: that is the lack of a practical perspective. While assessing a particular text, the deconstructionist does not allow for any distinction on lines of purpose or norms that may be operative while interpreting the text, say whether the text is to be taken lite rally or metaphorically. So, when Lear in Shakespeare's play King Lear says "Pray you undo this button"; as an individual's statement it can be seen as conveying a straight wish for undoing the button's hold, in the sense that instead of Lear, if it were a friend speaking to us, we would have advanced, accepted him/her communicative intent and unbuttoned the dress. Language here serves a simple practical purpose. However this is not to say that the statement means only that. The same statement can be read in several other, perhaps metaphorical ways. We can read in it a desire for release, a wish for assistance in seeking the release, etc. The point to be noted is that Lear's immediate wish for unbuttoning is conveyed effectively, no matter what else we make out of that statement.

That is when read in a simple straight communicative context; the statement does function and reveals a functional meaning, while in the metaphorical mode it can signify a number of other things. Now let us try to understand the deconstructionist's objection. Any' understanding of the functioning of that statement in the communicative context, theoretically: cannot overlook the state of indeterminacy. Demda appears to be right. But practically, we do arrest the indeterminacy, even if for a fleeting moment to create a meaning sense (?) which forms the basis of our understanding and subsequent action. How does that happen? Is this what Derrida means by saying Half there.. . ? All this amounts to saying that deconstruction does not pay enough attention to the practical aspects of the operation of language while theorizing about it. Similarly, when deconstructionists like Miller speak of the concept of "trace" to explain the indeterminacy of meaning, they are guilty of bracketing a number of other important forces which are at play in the process of creation of meaning. A word which has accumulated a number of traces in its history may theoretically speaking be in a state of "vibratory suspension" but, in the process of .- communication, that vibration is temporarily suspended by forces emanating from the social /political/ historical context, authorial intent, the reader's expectations, his/her potential or frame of mind, etc. That is what experience shows us - otherwise - every reading of a word would leave us eternally confused.

8.4.3 The Problem Of Telos

Another important problem associated with this theory is the problem of "telos" or '*goaUendU which it does not seem to address practically. If all interpretation is misinterpretation and if all criticism of texts can engage only with a critic's own misconstruction, why botner to carry on the activities of criticism and interpretation? Miller poses this question again and again and offers a rather disheartening answer. For him as for many other deconstructionists reading a text is like unravelling a spider's web, finally reaching an impasse. So, discussing Pater's writing, Miller writes: Pater's writings, like those of other major authors in the Occidental tradition are at once open to interpretation and are ultimately

indecipherable, unreadable. His texts lead the critic deeper and deeper into a labyrinth until he confronts a final aporia. This does not mean, however, that the reader must give up from the beginning the intent to understand Pater. Only by going all the way into the labyrinth, following the thread of a given clue, can the critic reach the blind alley, vacant of any Minotaur, that impasse which is the end point of interpretation. Let us study carefully what Miller has to say about interpretation here. Interpretation for him is not an impossibility but in one sense it finally leads to an impasse. He is deceptively silent about what happens in the proces~omething, which would have been relevant for anyone interested in understanding the way language functions. Because the critic reaches a final impasse therefore Pater's writings remain ultimately indecipherable and unreadabl-at is, no stable meaning (perhaps fixed meaning) can be attributed to it. This reduces all efforts at interpretation into a circular activity where the critic starts from a given premise to reach a blind alley again and again-no matter which text she is reading. The whole of human enterprise and achievements throughlanguage is thus reduced to a spider's web which the deconstructionist can do nothing about except unravel and show us that it.

8.4.4 The Charge Of Hypocrisy

First let us try to understand why the charge of hypocrisy has been leveled. If deconstruction questions the importance of language as a vehicle of communication then why does the deconstructionist write? If one of the things that deconstruction would have us believe is that the communicative powers of language are suspect, then why use language to communicate that across to us? Without the faith that writing conveys, even if approximately, the writer's intent, the project of writing becomes what could be called a graphic babbling exercise. So, if the deconstructionist is not babbling, she is indulging in hypocrisy. On the one hand, s/he would have us believe that language fails in communication, on the other, she uses language to express that failure of language to us. If the deconstructionist is right (and here we are speaking expressly of Miller), then how does he hope to express that opinion

across to us. The deconstructionist is simultaneously doing two things- exploiting a system to take us to a particular goal (of asserting their argument) and even while leading us there trying to show us that the system does not function (in Demda's case perfectly) - simply because, theoretically, there are not enough grounds for its effective functioning.

8.5 THE RISE OF NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

At the end of this reassessment of deconstruction let us try to put together the
problems outlined. Broadly speaking, we noted the following :

1. Its a historic nature
2. Wilful subversion of all coherent structures
3. Solely graph centric premises
4. Lack of any real responsibility
5. Contradicts practical experience
6. Appears to be goal-less
7. The charge of hypocrisy

To a certain degree each of these factors contributed to the sidelining of this theory. Deconstruction had a specially short but intense period of dedicated following and by the 1970s a new ferment could be noticed in the Western academic circles-* ferment which gave rise to the somewhat similar streams of Cultural Critique and New Historicism. The new historicist practice developed throughout the eighties, particularly on the pages of the journal Representations. Reacting to the avowedly ahistorical approach of structuralism and poststructuralism, Western critical thought seemed to have turned towards history with a renewed interest. The new historicists did not negate the premises of poststructuralism but used its strategies for their own purposes. New historicism was thus both a reaction against poststructuralism and a continuation of its strategies of textual reading. New historicism is best seen as a method of reading which attempts to examine textual traces of

the past but with the revised notion that the past is available to us in the form of a textuality which is also embedded in the present. For the new historicists, there can be no single unified history as in E.M.W. Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture but only shifting and contradictory representations of numerous histories. Instead of being seen as a unified representation of the past, History is now reviewed as a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of the past and present concerns. Thus, the historian is neither a transcendental commentator nor an objective chronicler because she is always implicated in the discourses, which help construct the history of a given era. Even in this elementary definition of new historicism, you can probably discern many poststructuralist terms and phrases : "Textual traces of the past", "Past. . . available to us as textuality", history as constructed out of "discourses"; these are all ideas new historicism borrows from poststructuralism and uses to understand and reconstructs the complexity that is our past. Like deconstruction, new historicism acknowledges its own limitations too. At the same time you can also see its renewed concern with history, its faith in meaning and its sense of responsibility about reconstructing the past - crucial points where it departs from poststructuralism.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

3. Discuss about Some Important Problems.

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4. Discuss the Rise of New Historicism and Cultural Critique.

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

At the end of this re-assessment you should be familiar with the following ideas. The turn towards language which we find in structuralism is an outcome of the questioning of the effectiveness of language as a tool of expression and a world of collapsing certainties where very little is left to be expressed. Poststructuralism continued on the lines of structuralism in its analysis of language but questioned it relentlessly. At least a part of the reason was political. From its inception, poststructuralism was against anything total and systematic and it was against this aspect of structuralism that the attack seems to have been leveled. However, poststructuralism it is not without problems.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French historian and philosopher, associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. He has had strong influence not only (or even primarily) in philosophy but also in a wide range of humanistic and social scientific disciplines.

8.7 KEY WORDS

Structuralist: In sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, structuralism is the methodology that implies elements of human culture must be understood by way of their relationship to a broader, overarching system or structure. It works to uncover the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think, perceive, and feel.

Post-structuralist: Post-structuralism is either a continuation or a rejection of the intellectual project that preceded it—structuralism.

8.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Explain and comment on the turn of critical attention towards language at the end of the modern era.
2. Explain and comment on the Derridean notion of difference as the source and process of the creation of meaning.
3. What do you understand by the term "telos". How does deconstruction conflict with the idea?

4. Analyze a day-to-day use of language and critically examine a deconstructionist's reaction to it.

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8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 8.2
2. See Section 8.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 8.4
2. See Section 8.5

UNIT 9: MICHEL FOUCAULT

STRUCTURE

9.0 Objectives

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Life and Works of Michel Foucault

9.3 Foucault and Power/Knowledge

9.4 Foucault and Ethics

9.4.1 The Ethical Turn

9.4.2 Defining Ethics as Care of the Self

9.4.3 Freedom and Ethics

9.5 Foucault and Feminism

9.5.1 Feminist Reservations Regarding Foucault

9.5.2 Mixed Reactions

9.5.3 Feminists in Defense of Foucault

9.6 Let us sum up

9.7 Key Words

9.8 Questions for Review

9.9 Suggested readings and references

9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Appreciate the significance of Michel Foucault's work within the context of contemporary Western thought;
- Explain Foucault's understanding of power;
- Discuss the ethical preoccupations of the later Foucault;
- Illuminate Foucault's idea of a useful politics;
- Elaborate on the different feminist responses to Foucault's work; and
- Assess the relative usefulness of Foucault for feminism.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Before you begin reading this Unit, you may find it helpful to review what you have read earlier. In this Unit, we will examine Foucault's

work much more closely with a view to better appreciate its implications for questions of gender identity and politics. To this end, we will first attempt to clarify Foucault's influential formulation of the power-knowledge coupling. Extending your prior exposure to Foucauldian ethics, we will then study Foucault's elaboration of an ethical praxis and politics deriving from the technologies of the self. Finally, we will explore the implications of Foucault's work on power, truth, subjectivity and ethics for women and gender politics through a synoptic account of various feminist responses to Foucauldian thinking on these matters.

9.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

Along with Derrida, Michel Foucault is one of the philosophers who achieved trans-Atlantic recognition and indelibly marked contemporary Western intellectual thought. He not only got written about in the November 1981 issue of TIME magazine as "France's philosopher of power," a survey also found that he was, in fact, the most cited scholar in the field of Humanities in the first decade of the 21st century. Foucault was born on 15th Oct 1926 in the provincial town of Poitiers, France. He had two other siblings, an older sister and a younger brother. Ceding to the tradition in his family, Foucault as the eldest son was christened Paul, after his father and grandfather, both of whom were surgeons. His mother, however, hyphenated Paul with Michel, so that Foucault in the early years of his life went by the name of Paul-Michel Foucault. By all accounts, Foucault hailed from an educated, affluent family that was also well connected. Both his parents were ambitious for their children and not shy about using their connections to help their offspring—a fact that considerably eased Michel Foucault's early years till he became established in his own right. Foucault did very well at studies through most of his school years, studying first at Lycée Henry IV at Poitiers and later at the College Saint Stanislas. He qualified for the university by passing his bac in 1943, but while his father wanted him to study medicine, Foucault aspired to join the prestigious ENS to study philosophy. This meant successfully negotiating a tough entrance examination. Foucault prepared for a year to achieve his objective,

studying at the Lycée Henri IV, Paris. He joined ENS in 1946. At ENS, Foucault studied under Merleau Ponty, Althusser, and others.

He received his licence de philosophie (1948), the equivalent of a BA degree, a licence de psychologie (1949), and cleared his aggregation de philosophie in 1952 after initially failing it in 1950. In the same year, Foucault did a brief teaching stint at the University of Lille, while getting a Diplome de psycho-pathologie from the Institut de Psychologie, Paris. Through Althusser's support, Foucault also got an opportUnity to teach psychology at ENS and have, among others, Jacques Derrida attend his lectures. From 1955 on, however, Foucault chose to undertake a series of foreign assignments—in 1955, first, as director of the Maison de France, University of Uppsala, then in 1958, at Warsaw, Poland, as a French cultural attaché and, in 1959, at the Institut Francais, Hamburg. He returned to France in 1960 to teach psychology in the philosophy department of Clerrmont-Ferrand. Foucault remained here till 1966, when he followed his long-time partner, Daniel Defert, to Tunisia (Defert had been posted to Tunisia for compulsory military service in 1964). Foucault took up the chair of philosophy at the University of Tunisia. In 1968 he returned to take charge of the Philosophy Department at a newly set-up university at Vincennes, Paris.

While Foucault missed the student uprisings of 1968 for the most part, his radical stewardship at Vincennes stirred up quite a bit of controversy. By 1970, however, Foucault had secured election to the premier Collège de France, where he remained till his death as chair in the "History of Systems of Thought." Though Foucault only earned his doctorate in 1961, his first publication dates back to 1954. Mental Illness and Personality, a publication Foucault later modified and eventually distanced himself from, was followed by a series of path-breaking books—from History of Madness (or Madness and Civilisation) to Birth of a Clinic; from The Order of Things to The Archaeology of Knowledge; from Discipline and Punish to the multivolume and incomplete History of Sexuality, the fourth volume of which Foucault was working on at the time of his death—that cemented Foucault's

position as one of the foremost contemporary thinkers in France. Despite disavowing labels: "I have never been a Freudian, I have never been a Marxist and I have never been a structuralist [or poststructuralist]" (Raulet as cited in Gane, 1986, p. 3), Foucault was never shy of activism. Early in the 1950s he had been a member of the French Communist Party, albeit only for a couple of years. Later on, Foucault's activism saw him become founder member of the prison information group GIP to expose conditions of penal incarceration in France; participate in protests against General Franco's atrocities against his opponents; criticize the Communist regime of Poland; be the treasurer of the international branch of Solidarity, a trade union association; report on the Iranian Islamic revolution for an Italian publication, among others. Since his position at the Collège de France required him only to deliver a set of research-based lectures annually, Foucault also managed to tour internationally, to South America, Japan, the US. In fact, at the time of his death he had an arrangement to teach part of the year at the University of California, Berkeley.

Foucault died in June 1984. If his life—suicide attempts, fear of lapsing into madness, his early conflicted feelings about his homosexuality, complexes about his looks, enthusiasm for "limit experiences," experimentation with, and endorsement of drugs and S/M practices—was colourful and controversial, his death was no less. Foucault was one of the earliest high profile casualties of AIDS and it has been alleged that despite knowing his diagnosis Foucault continued to indulge in unprotected sex, thus exposing his partners to a potentially fatal infection (see Miller, 2000). It's impossible to determine Foucault's culpability with any certainty so many years after his death, especially when we also remember how little was known about AIDS at the time, even in the medical commUnity. As V. Y. Mudimbe (1992) points out, Foucault's life and legacy contains many contradictions. "Foucault's image today is generally one of an antiinstitutional militant. But this contradicts the whole of his career: all his positions abroad were made possible by powerful friends, and his election to the Collège of France was the result of politicking on the part of people who did not share the ideological

opinions of Foucault the philosopher and the activist. At the time of his death, bureaucratic Parisian projects were underway to send him abroad (to Japan or the United States) as a cultural attaché." However, "[b]eyond the play of contradictory images, one meets a philosopher, a 'saint,' simultaneously modest and ambitious, who was critical enough not to become a Jesuit and sincere enough not to play systematically by the game of the French bourgeoisie that was his own milieu" (Mudimbe, 1992, p. 127). Intellectually, Foucault attempted to break away from the phenomenological, existentialist, Marxist and structuralist thinking that dominated the French intellectual scene at the time. He looked, rather, to Nietzsche, Heidegger, Canguilhem and Bachelard, among others, to forge an alternative praxis. His work has enjoyed a wide cross-disciplinary readership and influence. Its value has variously been deemed to lie in the way in which it "successfully bridges the divides between structural and phenomenological approaches… or between structural and historical analyses… or between Marxist and critical theory" (Gane, 1986, p. 3). However, Foucault has also come in for criticism. Perry Anderson, for instance, is scathing in his assessment of Foucault's impact on Marxist thinking (see Anderson, 1983). Habermas, Taylor, Rorty, Derrida, and some feminists have also been critical of various Foucauldian formulations. Foucault's own summation of his body of work perceives "three axes" of genealogy at play: "First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth, through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents" (Foucault, 2000b, p. 262). Keeping these points in mind, let us attempt, in the next two sections, to flesh out some of the main ideas in Foucault's engagements with the power-knowledge coupling on the one hand, and with ethics and subjectivity, on the other.

9.3 FOUCAULT AND POWER/KNOWLEDGE

Foucault's early works are dedicated to the "archaeology of knowledge." He achieved this by undertaking a historical scrutiny of "discursive formations" (large body of statements or texts hierarchically ordered by particular sets of protocols and procedures of production) and the episteme (underlying, unconscious conditions of possibility for knowledge production at any given time) that gave rise to them. However, Foucault's most influential as well contentious articulations have been about power. Around the time of Discipline and Punish (1979) and after, Foucault began to develop a more sustained enquiry into the nature and modes of power and its imbrication with knowledge and truth. What resulted was a distinctive thoroughgoing analytic of power and an influential rewriting of its conjunction with knowledge. According to Foucault, the dominant discourse on power in the Humanities reveals significant lacuna and misrepresentation. On the one hand, "Mechanisms of power in general have never been much studied by history. • History has studied those who held power—anecdotal histories of kings and generals. • Contrasted with this there has been the history of economic processes and infrastructures. • Again, distinct from this, we have had histories of institutions, of what has been viewed as a superstructural level in relation to the economy. But power in its strategies, at once general and detailed, and its mechanisms, has never been studied" (Foucault, 1980c, p. 51). This neglect in the study of how power functions is compounded by a persistent misreading of the relation between power and truth. "What has been studied even less" Foucault says, is the relation between power and knowledge, the articulation of each on the other. It has been a tradition for humanism to assume that once someone gains power he ceases to know. Power makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; only those who keep their distance from power, who are in no way implicated in tyranny, shut up in their Cartesian poele, their room, their meditations, only they can discover the truth. (Foucault, 1980c, p. 51)

The dichotomous reading of power and knowledge/truth has been a salient feature of Western scholarship, which, Foucault asserts, needs to be interrogated: [T]he great myth according to which truth never belongs

to political power…. needs to be dispelled. It is this myth which Nietzsche began to demolish by showing, in the numerous texts already cited, that, behind all knowledge (savoir), behind all attainment of knowledge (connaissance), what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge, it is woven together with it. (Foucault, 1994c, p. 32) According to Foucault, traditionally power has been analysed through two schemas: i) the economistic "contract—oppression schema," and ii) the domination—repression or war—repression schema" (Foucault, 1980e, p. 92). The former is based on the idea that political power follows a legal and contractual model of exchange (Foucault, 1980e, p. 88). In such a model "power is taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which can in consequence transfer or alienate…through a legal act." In other words, "Power is that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established" (Foucault, 1980e, p. 88). The second non-economist analyses of power combines two strands of thinking. Foucault calls the former Reich's hypothesis. This hypothesis "argues that the mechanisms of power are those of repression." The second one, which he calls Nietzsche's hypothesis, argues that the basis of the relationship of power lies in "the hostile engagement of forces" (Foucault, 1980e, p. 91). While drawing inspiration from Nietzsche, among others, Foucault sets about providing a necessary corrective to these prevalent misunderstandings of power in the Western world. Foucault's single most significant intervention on power remains in radically rewriting this age-old script by emphasising the function of power as a positive force. The way Foucault puts it, "…power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, ... If, on the contrary, power is strong, this is because…it produces effects at the level of desire— and also at the level of knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it" (Foucault, 1980a, p. 59). As for what is power itself, Foucault asserts that power qua power is a myth: "Power in the substantive sense, 'le' pouvoir, doesn't exist…. In reality power means relations, a more or less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 199).

In other words, "there is no such entity as power, with or without a capital letter: global, massive or diffused; concentrated or distributed. Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 340). Clarifying the specific nature of power relationships, Foucault maintains that power is not to be confused with violence: "A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys or it closes of all possibilities." A power relationship, on the other hand, requires that over which power is exercised be "recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts." Also, far from shutting off options, a power relationship enables "a whole field of responses, reactions, results and possible inventions" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 340) to remain in play. Foucault also emphasized the necessary and inextricable inter-articulation of power and knowledge/truth. He claims that "truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power ...Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power" (Foucault, 1980d, p. 131). Further defining his meaning, Foucault asserts that "'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault, 1980d, p. 133). Foucault credits his understanding of power/knowledge to a distinctive methodology he adopted. According to Foucault, instead of asking what and why with regard to power, he concentrated on the how of power: "'How is it exercised?' and 'What happens when individuals exert (as we say) power over others?'" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 337). The chief advantage of pursuing this trajectory of thought is that it does not a priori assume the object which it sets out to study. Rather, it is based on "the suspicion that power as such does not exist" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 336). In practical terms, Foucault argues that any effective study of power relations as it obtains at a given historical moment would clarify the following five key matters:

- "The system of differentiations that permits one to act upon the actions of others…";
- "The types of objectives pursued by those who act upon the action of others…";
- The "instrumental modes" through which power is exercised;
- The "forms of institutionalization" in evidence; and finally
- "The degrees of rationalization" that mark the exercise and ambit of power (Foucault, 1994b, p. 344).

Thus, Foucault studies the way in which power has been exercised at various times through Western history, all the while proclaiming why it is imperative to engage with the operations of power. Foucault attempts neither to naturalize the particular power relations that exist in a society, nor to make of power an unassailable core of society. Rather, through his analysis, he seeks to draw out the relations between power and freedom in the form of a political task (Foucault, 1994b, p. 343). Thus, one of the many significant insights to emerge from Foucault's researches concerns the nature of power in the modern Western world.

Discipline: The New Modality of Power According to Foucault, from roughly the eighteenth century onwards a new modality of power comes to the fore. He calls this discipline. According to him, the modern state is a new form of the Christian pastoral power, which is " salvation-oriented" (as opposed to political power")…; "oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty)"; … "individualizing (as opposed to legal power)" and is 'linked with a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself" (Foucault, 1994b, p. 333). In the modern world, this type of pastoral power witnesses a change of objectives.

• It was not oriented towards salvation in the next world but in this world through ensuring health, security, etc.

• Likewise the administrators of pastoral power undergo a telling increase extending to various state functionaries and experts.

• Further, there is a bifocal accumulation of knowledge about man around the population/individual axis.

In addition to highlighting the diffuse nature of power relations in the modern world, Foucault also comments on the specific nature of the power/ truth/knowledge nexus that prevails. Based on his analysis, Foucault proposes genealogy as the preferred method of resistant practice to be used by the (modern, class and professionally located) specific intellectual. Foucault contends that genealogy is emancipatory insofar as it excavates the critiques of subaltern knowledge bodies and uses these against the reductive and repressive, homogenizing and hierarchizing tendencies of modern scientific discourse. What genealogy "really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a Unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects" (Foucault, 1980e, p. 83). The task for the modern intellectual is to disengage "the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (Foucault, 1980d, p. 133). Whether one agrees with the particulars of Foucault's assertions on power, truth and knowledge or not, what is beyond debate is that it constitutes a new perspective on modern social relations. This perspective not only proved influential among scholars, thinkers and practitioners across disciplines internationally, but also provided the inspiration for a new politics. In the next section, let us focus on Foucault's developing view of power in the form of ethical praxis and subjectivity.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

Notes

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Life and Works of Michel Foucault.

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2. Discuss the Foucault and Power/Knowledge.

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9.4 FOUCAULT AND ETHICS

The "ethical turn" in Foucault's works is to be observed roughly from 1980 on to the time of his death a few years later. While others have called it a "break" from his earlier preoccupations, Foucault speaks about it more as an evolution and elaboration of his older concerns rather than any radical rupture. Let us look at this notion more closely.

9.4.1 The Ethical Turn

To the extent that the earlier Foucault attended to the coercive practices of power and the later Foucault concentrates on the practices of selfarticulation, truth and freedom, there is certainly a shift of focus in his work. Foucault grants as much. However, Foucault also claims he "has always been interested in the problem of the relationship between subject and truth…. What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another, as a mad or healthy subject, as a delinquent or nondelinquent subject, through certain practices that were also games of truth, practices of power, and so on" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 289-90). This section offers you a synoptic introduction to Foucault's later engagement with the question of ethics. Foucault's most notable engagement with ethics occurs in the context of Classical Greco-Roman sexuality in his works, The History of Sexuality vols 2 and 3 or The Use of Pleasure (1992) and Care of the Self (1986), respectively. According to Foucault, in order to fathom the modern

conceptualization of the human being as “a subject of a ‘sexuality,’ it was essential first to determine how for centuries, Western man had been brought to recognize himself as a subject of desire” (Foucault, 1992, p. 6). This line of inquiry led him to engage with the repeated evidence of the “problematization” of sexual conduct in Western history. For Foucault, the early sexual problematic from classic antiquity to the beginning of Christianity offered the earliest examples of the “‘techniques of the self’” (Foucault, 1992, p. 10) and ethical praxis. Most notably the impetus here was not any universalizing proscription. Rather, the sexual ethic addressed precisely those domains in which men had social license to exercise their claims, thus making it “the elaboration and stylization of an activity in the exercise of is powers and the practice of its liberties” (Foucault, 1992, p. 23). Overall, Foucault describes his endeavour in these texts and his later years in general to be writing “[t]he genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions, or the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem” (Foucault, 2000b, p. 266).

9.4.2 Defining Ethics As Care Of The Self

Foucault defines ethics as the “relations with oneself”; as “the government of the self by oneself…” (Foucault, 2000d, p. 88); as the “technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality” (Foucault, 2000e, p. 225). Foucault investigates ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian ethics chiefly through the range of practices comprehended by the dictum epimeleisthai sautou or “‘to take care of yourself,’ to take ‘care of the self,’ ‘to be concerned, to take care of yourself’” (Foucault, 2000e, p. 226). While clarifying that is not to say “ethics is synonymous with the care of the self,” he argues that “in antiquity, ethics as the conscious practice of freedom has revolved around this fundamental imperative” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 285). According to Foucault, the modern West is more familiar with the Delphic admonition “Know yourself.” In antiquity however, knowing yourself could not happen without taking care of the

self. Foucault shows the different ways in which classical Greco-Roman and early Christian cultures practice care of the self. However, in so doing, he also meticulously notes the changes and transformations that the meanings, actions and activities that the care of the self represents undergo—from its Grecian manifestation to its Roman and Christian avatars. Foucault tracks these continuities and discontinuities in terms of the four different aspects that make up the ethical relation with oneself. These are: • Ethical substance or the aspect or part of oneself that is concerned with ethical conduct, for instance, is it feelings, or desire or pleasure, etc. • Mode of subjectification or "the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations" (Foucault, 2000b, p. 264), for example, is it god's commandment, or rational law or natural order, etc. • The means of self-transformation that are used to turn one into an ethical subject—is it exercising moderation, is it cleansing our desires, or actively using them, etc. • Finally, telos or the ideal we aspire towards when we behave ethically— is it purity, immortality, harmony, freedom, self-mastery, etc. (Foucault, 2000b, p. 263-65).

Foucault's chief conclusions are two-fold. First, despite differences in ways of living these codes, "nearly the same restrictive, the same prohibitive code" exists among the Greek, Roman and early Christian societies (Foucault, 2000b, p. 254). Second, Foucault believes the difference can be attributed to the fact that the pagan ethic's focus was aesthetic: "it was a personal choice for a small elite. The reason for making this choice was the will to live a beautiful life…" (Foucault, 2000b, p. 254). Foucault contends that the dual influences of Christianity and Descartean rationality have all but eclipsed the classical expression of the cultivation of the self. Consequently, the modern Western world fixates on desire and ignores pleasure and the idea of ascesis (self-restraint) vis-à-vis truth. The answer though is not any simple-minded revival of the older ethic. Foucault is clear that the "Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other [woman or slave], an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy" (Foucault, 2000b, p. 258). The modern need, Foucault suggests, is for an ethics of pleasure

built on reciprocity "We have to create new pleasure" (Foucault, 2000c, p. 166) and actively aestheticize our lives.

9.4.3 Freedom And Ethics

In his last few lectures, Foucault identifies parrhesia (literally, "telling all") or the practice of frank-speech as a particularly important component of the ethics and care of the self. Describing the relationship between ethics and freedom, Foucault is emphatic that "[f]reedom is the ontological condition of ethics" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 284). Parrhesia is necessarily ethical but not all free "speech activity" is parrhesia. Foucault distinguishes parrhesia from rhetoric, prophecy and sage's wisdom and says, parrhesia is a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty. More precisely, parrhesia is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In parrhesia, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy. (Foucault, 1983, para.22) Ultimately, for Foucault "Parrhesia is not a skill; it is something which is harder to define. It is a stance, a way of being which is akin to a virtue, a mode of action" (Foucault, 2011, 14). Indeed, though studied as a specific mode of truth-telling known in antiquity, Foucault finally sees his own and critical philosophy's role (more generally) in modern times as impelled by parrhesia and the practice of freedom. Now that we have understood Foucault's formulations of power, knowledge, truth and ethics, let us turn to some feminist responses to these issues.

9.5 FOUCAULT AND FEMINISM

While Foucault did work and comment on sexuality, he never directly engaged with the subject of women in any sustained fashion. Despite

this, Foucault has generated great interest among contemporary feminists. Foucault's delineations of power/knowledge and ethical subjectivity, quite apart from his writings on sexuality, have drawn both praise and criticism from a range of feminist thinkers. Let us briefly discuss some of these feminist responses to Foucault.

9.5.1 Feminist Reservations Regarding Foucault

Feminist thinkers unconvinced by Foucault's works have routinely voiced concerns that can be broadly enumerated under the following heads:

- Foucault's rejection of norms and universalist imperatives—feminists ask what this means for any systematic analysis and evaluation.

- Foucault's questioning of the idea of a Unitary, stable subject and subjectivity—feminists ask what this means for agency.

- Foucault's articulation of power—feminists ask what it means for politics, resistance and transformation.

- Foucault's disregard of gender and the specific subjectivity of women even when focussing on sexuality—feminists ask what this means for them and their politics and concerns.

Toril Moi (1985) is not alone in thinking that "The price for giving in to his [Foucault's] powerful discourse is nothing less than the depoliticisation of feminism" (Moi, 1985, p. 95). Foucault himself has tried to allay some of these concerns, especially visà-vis power, which he states is based on a misunderstanding of his thoughts. It is often alleged, by feminists, among others, that Foucault's conception of power is totalising and leaves little room for any meaningful recourse against it. As Foucault (2000a) explains, "in human relationships, whether they involve verbal communication such as we are engaged in at this moment, or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always

present…. These power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all." Consequently, "in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. This being the general form, I refuse to reply to the question I am sometimes asked: 'But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom.'" His answer: "if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 292).

Foucault holds that conditions of power and powerlessness are never absolutes. Being palpable only in and as relations, they are, rather, constantly open to be written and rewritten. This, according to him, opens up a host of possibilities for us instead of the narrow range of options presented to us when we take power to be monolithic, substantive, and absolute. Not everyone, however, is convinced by or heedful of these clarifications. Standpoint theorist, Nancy Hartsock (1990), for instance, alleges that"Foucault reproduces in his work the situation of the colonizer who resists (and in so doing renders his work inadequate and even irrelevant to the needs of the colonized or the dominated)" (Hartsock, 1990, p. 166). She contends that for Foucault "Power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere" (Hartsock, 1990, p. 170). This makes it systematically and socially useless for marginalised and oppressed people who are better off constructing a politics based on their lived, "minority" experience. Monique Deveaux likewise feels Foucault is not equal to the requirements of feminist politics which "take[s] the delineation of women's oppression and the concrete transformation of society as central aims" (Deveaux, 1996, p. 212). She gives two reasons for her position: one, that Foucault's conceptualization of the subject tends to "erase women's specific experiences of power" and two, the inability of this "model of power to account for, much less articulate processes of empowerment" (p. 212). Taking Foucault's views that rape should be seen as ordinary assault and only the physical violence involved should be penalised as illustrative, she offers four further points to undercore his theoretical inability to understand either

feminist concerns or women's realities. According to Deveaux, Foucault comes up short because a. he "falsely posits 'free agents' as a necessary feature of power"; b. "his analysis does not consider women's internal barriers to agency and choice, as with the example of shame"; c. "it sets up a false dichotomy between power and violence, as illustrated by the continuum of anger and physical abuse experienced by a battered woman"; and d. "it does not question the fact that in many societies, men's freedom …is contingent upon women's unfreedom…rather than on the presence of a freely maneuvering antagonist" (Deveaux, 1996, p. 225-26). Others like Nancy Fraser voice reservations about Foucault's rejection of humanism, asserting that he never offers a persuasive rationale for his thinking. In this context, she asks: "Supposing one abandons a foundationalist grounding of humanist values, then to what sort of nonfoundationalist justification can such values lay claim?" adding that Foucault never squarely faces this question (Fraser, 1996, 24). Instead, she observes that he tries to "displace it by insinuating that values can neither have nor require justification" (Fraser, 1996, p. 24). Thus, according to Fraser, Foucault did not produce "a satisfactory non-humanist political rhetoric" and asks, "whether Foucault's rhetoric really does the job of distinguishing better from worse regimes of domination" (Fraser, 1996, p. 25). Put differently, Fraser feels that, on closer scrutiny, Foucault fails to deliver because Foucault's studies lack clear standards of evaluation. Consequently, his assessments are not necessary and convincing conclusions so much as an articulation of subjective inclinations.

9.5.2 Mixed Reactions

Many feminists are not so singularly censorious or pessimistic about Foucault. They exhibit mixed reactions: often criticising Foucault's shortcomings, prejudices or oversights while appropriating different aspects of his work to serve their various feminist purposes and politics. Thus Terry Aladjem notes the absence of women in Foucault's elaboration of the ethical care of the self (Aladjem, 1996, p. 287). Her conclusion about Foucault is far from dismissive on this count. She

argues rather that "If he seems to dissolve the category of woman within power—which is dangerous—he has also begun to dissolve the very power that defines her as such" (Aladjem, 1996, p. 288). Similarly, Sandra Bartky finds Foucault's elucidation of the many disciplinary grids in the modern world subjecting human bodies to be particularly useful but she also asks "Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men?" (Bartky, 1988, p. 63). Foucault's gender blindness becomes in many ways the point of departure for Teresa de Lauretis' influential Technologies of Gender. Describing her project, she writes, "A starting point may be to think of gender along the lines of Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality as a 'technology of sex'" (Lauretis, 1987, p. 2). While acknowledging her debt to Foucault, Lauretis also makes it clear "that to think of gender as the product and the process of a number of social technologies, of techno-social or bio-medical apparati, is to have already gone beyond Foucault." This is because, according to her, Foucault's theory "excludes, though it does not preclude, the consideration of gender" (Lauretis, 1987, p. 3). Naomi Schor repeats the double-move against Foucault. On the one hand, she insists that Foucault is gender blind: "the question of gender cannot be said to inform Foucault's project" (Schor, 1989, p. 55). On the other hand, vis-à-vis his later works on sexual ethics she finds at least three aspects of interest to feminist scholars: "first, the scrupulous attention Foucault pays to the gender of the enunciating subject; second, the subtle way in which he decenters the 'woman question'; and third and finally, the pride of place he accords a model of heterosexual relations based on reciprocity and mutual respect" (Schor, 1989, p. 54). Even in these later works and despite Foucault's greater attention to questions of exclusion, Schor claims that two problems persist: "the woman who becomes in Foucault's words, 'the other par excellence' is 'the wife-woman' and, furthermore, alterity is, of course, not specificity" (p. 57). In other words, she cautions against both the reduction and whitewashing of women's particularity of experiences in Foucault's ethical expositions. This ultimately leads her to wonder, "[a]t the risk of being a wallflower at the carnival of plural sexualities," if "the discourse of sexual

indifference/pure difference is not the last or (less triumphantly) the latest ruse of phallocentrism?" (Schor, 1989, p. 57).

Jon Simons also decries Foucault's masculinist bias but then offers a startling reversal in the way the relationship between Foucault and feminism is usually posited. Taking issue with Foucault's works on the "care of the self," Simons writes that "Although subjectification, or assujettissement, is the focus of Foucault's work, his gender blindness and androcentricism lead him, and perhaps his readers, to overlook its most significat manifestation. In none of his analyses of that 'form of power which makes individuals subjects' did Foucault pay any attention to women's enormous role, especially as mothers, in the process of subjectification" (Simons, 1996, p. 179). According to him, Foucault's "focus on disciplines that produce masculine rather than feminine bodies is implicitly a denial that we are all 'of woman born' and mostly by women raised." Simons contends that "Foucault overlooks the significant subjectifying power of women as caretakers which, as feminist theorists have pointed out, offers the most concrete model of power as empowerment, constituting initially helpless infants as autonomous adults" (Simons,1996, p. 179-80). Thereafter, Simons talks of "subversive mothering" as a significant part of feminist politics. He defines 'subversive mothering" as the attempt "to break simultaneously the confinement of women to mothering and caring subject positions while retaining the empowerment authorized by such positions" (Simons, 1996, p. 196-97). Simons most important move is reserved for the last. "If the disruption of the correspondence between individualization and totalization is a prerequisite for liberation, and if a feminist strategy of subversive mothering is integral to such disruption, then" he asks, "whether there can be a Foucauldian politics that is not feminist" (Simons, 1996, p. 205-06).

9.5.3 Feminists In Defence Of Foucault

While the above provide more or less qualified support to Foucault's writing, Foucault is also not without more unequivocal and enthusiastic defenders. Judith Butler(1990) and her rendering of sex as performative

in Gender Trouble (1990) is one of the more obvious examples of Foucault's theories being used by feminists. Susan Bordo applies Foucauldian notions of "docile bodies" (1989) being subjected to disciplinary controls and constructions in her study of anorexia nervosa and bulimia among women. Honi Fern Haber, meanwhile, claims that "Foucault's writings on the body and power challenge us to fight back with our bodies, to find new ways of meaning our bodies, and hence new ways of understanding ourselves and shaping our culture" (Haber, 1996, p.139). One way for women to recode traditional sex/gender inscriptions, Haber suggests is "with muscle" (p. 139). Speaking of the phenomenon of female body-builders, she writes, "in confusing accepted gender dichotomies, the body of the muscled woman problematizes seeing in a way that calls attention to the cultural presuppositions oppressing both men and women on an unconscious or ideological level" (Haber, 1996, p. 142). Margaret A McLaren similarly finds great value and utility in Foucault's ideas about subjectivity, power, knowledge and the body. Inspired by Foucault's theories, she suggests "that consciousness-raising can be viewed as a feminist practice of the self… promot[ing] both individual and collective transformation." How is such a proposition supported by Foucauldian thought? According to McLaren "Foucault's conception of social norms articulates an important mediating structure between individual identity and social, political, and legal institutions. This link between individual identity and social institutions means that self-transformation is not simply an individual personl goal, but must involve structural, social and political change. This overlap of the ethical and the political and the conception of the self as embodied and socially constituted are…important theoretical resources for contemporary feminism" (McLaren, 2002, p. 15-16). Jana Sawicki is another influential voice that is positive in its estimation of Foucault's value for feminism. On the one hand, she notes the overlap between Foucault's works and feminist concerns: "Foucault's analyses of the dimensions of disciplinary power exercised outside the confines of the political realm of the modern liberal state overlapped with those of feminists already engaged in the project of exploring the micropolitics of 'private' life" (Sawicki, 1996, p. 160). On the other, she argues that "his methods and cautionary tales

have been useful and productive for feminist intellectuals struggling to combat dangerous trends within feminist theory and practice— feminist theorists who share neither his androcentrism nor his exclusive focus on subjection." According to Sawicki Foucault's most important contribution feminism is that ultimately he "asks us to reconsider the value of the emancipatory practices and theories that have been handed down to us through Western capitalist patriarchal traditions. Thus, his work fuels self-critical impulses within feminism that are indispensable" (Sawicki, 1996, p. 176-77). Clearly Foucault's work has a had a powerful impact on feminist thinking: the range of responses attest to the many ways in which Foucault has offered provocation and inspiration to feminist engagement. In the final analysis, though it may only be just to read Foucault with his own admonition in mind: "My point is not that everthing is bad, but that everything is dangerous" (Foucault, 2000b, p. 256). In other words, just as a critical, locally rooted appropriation and use of Foucault is certainly valuable, a mindless, locally ill-informed imitation of Foucault is not only of questionable value but also potentially dangerous!

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write about Foucault and Ethics.

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2. Write about Foucault and Feminism.

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have focussed in some depth on Foucauldian thinking. A brief introduction to the life and works of Foucault provides the context for this study: it establishes Foucault's importance as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century. We then proceed to an engagement with Foucault's delineation of the power-knowledge coupling. We have especially focussed here on how Foucault understands power to be a positive force, which, far from being antagonistic to knowledge/truth, actually both constitutes the latter, and is constituted by it. This is followed by a closer scrutiny of Foucault's engagement with an ethical "aesthetic of existence." Among other things, we have focussed here on how Foucault's work on ethics becomes the basis also of a new politics for him based on a parrhesiainspired critical function. Finally, we have provided a summary account of the range of disapproving as well approving feminist responses that Foucault's work on power, truth, subjectivity and ethics has generated. After perusal, it is hoped that this Unit will have equipped you to critically engage and or adapt Foucauldian thinking when tackling not only theoretical questions of gender identity, but also practical problems of feminist politics.

9.7 KEY WORDS

Subjectivity: Subjectivity is a central philosophical concept, related to consciousness, agency, personhood, reality, and truth, which has been variously defined by sources.

Knowledge: Knowledge is a familiarity, awareness, or understanding of someone or something, such as facts, information, descriptions, or skills, which is acquired through experience or education by perceiving, discovering, or learning. Knowledge can refer to a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

9.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What are the two models of understanding power? Briefly explain each one in your own words.

2. What is Foucault's most radical contribution to the study of power?
3. How does Foucault understand the relationship between power and knowledge/truth?
4. In what way, according to Foucault, is the modern state a form of Christian pastoral power?
5. How, or in what form, does the disciplinary mode of power operate?
6. Explain the term "subjugated knowledges."
7. When did the "ethical turn" occur in Foucault's writings? How did he talk about this "turn" in his writings?
8. Explain the term "arts of existence"?
9. How does Foucault explain the link between sexuality and ethics?
10. How does Foucault define ethics?
11. What are the problems with the modern and pagan ethics, according to Foucault?
12. What, according to you, would be a desirable ethics for the future?

9.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 9.2
2. See Section 9.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 9.4
2. See Section 9.5

UNIT 10: GENEALOGY, DISCOURSE, AND ARCHAEOLOGY: POWER AND KNOWLEDGE.

STRUCTURE

10.0 Objectives

10.1 Introduction

10.2 From Archaeology to Genealogy

10.3 History of the Prison

10.4 History of Modern Sexuality

10.5 Sex in the Ancient World

10.6 Foucault after Foucault

10.7 Let us sum up

10.8 Key Words

10.9 Questions for Review

10.10 Suggested readings and references

10.11 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

After this unit, students can able to understand:

- To know the changes from Archaeology to Genealogy
- To know the History of the Prison
- O know the History of Modern Sexuality
- O discuss the Sex in the Ancient World
- To find the relation Foucault after Foucault.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

For many years now historians have preferred to turn their attention to long periods, as if, beneath the shifts and changes of political events, they were trying to reveal the stable, almost indestructible system of checks and balances, the irreversible processes, the constant readjustments, the underlying tendencies that gather force, and are then

suddenly reversed after centuries of continuity, the movements of accumulation and slow saturation, the great silent, motionless bases that traditional history has covered with a thick layer of events. The tools that enable historians to carry out this work of analysis are partly inherited and partly of their own making: models of economic growth, quantitative analysis of market movements, accounts of demographic expansion and contraction, the study of climate and its long-term changes, the fixing of sociological constants, the description of technological adjustments and of their spread and continuity. These tools have enabled workers in the historical field to distinguish various sedimentary strata; linear successions, which for so long had been the object of research, have given way to discoveries in depth. From the political mobility at the surface down to the slow movements of'material civilization', ever more levels of analysis have been established: each has its own peculiar discontinuities and patterns; and as one descends to the deepest levels, the rhythms become broader. Beneath the rapidly changing history of governments, wars, and famines, there emerge other, apparently unmoving histories: the history of sea routes, the history of com or of gold-mining, the history of drought and of irrigation, the history of crop rotation, the history of the balance achieved by the human species between hunger and abundance. The old questions of the traditional analysis (What link should be made between disparate events? How can a causal succession be established between them? What continuity or overall significance do they possess? Is it possible to define a totality, or must one be content with reconstituting connexions?) are now being replaced by questions of another type: which strata should be isolated from others? What types of series should be established? What criteria of periodization should be adopted for each of them? What system of relations (hierarchy, dominance, stratification, univocal determination, circular causality) may be established between them? What series of series may be established? And in what large-scale chronological table may distinct series of events be determined? At about the same time, in the disciplines that we call the history of ideas, the history of science, the history of philosophy, the history of thought, and the history of literature (we can ignore their specificity for the moment), in those disciplines

which, despite their names, evade very largely the work and methods of the historian, attention has been turned, on the contrary, away from vast unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity. Beneath the great continuities of thought, beneath the solid, homogeneous manifestations of a single mind or of a collective mentality, beneath the stubborn development of a science striving to exist and to reach completion at the very outset, beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline, or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions. Interruptions whose status and nature vary considerably. There are the epistemological acts and thresholds described by Bachelard: they suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time, cut it off from it empirical origin and its original motivations, cleanse it of its imaginary complicities; they direct historical analysis away from the search for silent beginnings, and the never-ending tracing-back to the original precursors, towards the search for a new type of rationality and its various effects. There are the displacements and transformations of concepts: the analyses of G. Canguilhem may serve as models; they show that the history of a concept is not wholly and entirely that of its progressive refinement, its continuously increasing rationality, its abstraction gradient, but that of its various fields of constitution and validity, that of its successive rules of use, that of the many theoretical contexts in which it developed and matured. There is the distinction, which we also owe to Canguilhem, between the microscopic and macroscopic scales of the history of the sciences, in which events and their consequences are not arranged in the same way: thus a discovery, the development of a method, the achievements, and the failures, of a particular scientist, do not have the same incidence, and cannot be described in the same way at both levels; on each of the two levels, a different history is being written. Recurrent redistributions reveal several pasts, several forms of connexion, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never

cease, in turn, to break with themselves (in the field of mathematics, M. Serres has provided the theory of this phenomenon). There are the architectonic unities of systems of the kind analysed by M. Gueroult, which are concerned not with the description of cultural influences, traditions, and continuities, but with internal coherences, axioms, deductive connexions, compatibilities. Lastly, the most radical discontinuities are the breaks effected by a work of theoretical transformation 'which establishes a science by detaching it from the ideology of its past and by revealing this past as ideological'.1 To this should be added, of course, literary analysis, which now takes as its unity, not the spirit or sensibility of a period, nor 'groups', 'schools', 'generations', or 'movements', nor even the personality of the author, in the interplay of his life and his 'creation', but the particular structure of a given reuvre, book, or text. And the great problem presented by such historical analyses is not how continuities are established, how a single pattern is formed and preserved. how for so many different, successive minds there is a single horizon, what mode of action and what substructure is implied by the interplay of transmissions, resumptions, disappearances. and repetitions, how the origin may extend its sway well beyond itself to that conclusion that is never given - the problem is no longer one of tradition. of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations. What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions, some of which arc already familiar, by which this new form of history is trying to develop its own theory: how is one to specify the different concepts that enable us to conceive of discontinuity (threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation)? By what criteria is one to isolate the unities with which one is dealing; what is a science? What is an reuvre?What is a theory?What is a concept? What is a text? How is one to diversify the levels at which one may place oneself, each of which possesses its own divisions and form of analysis? What is the legitimate level of formalization? What is that of interpretation? Of structural analysis? Of attributions of causality? In short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more

and more discontinuities, whereas history itself appears to be abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures. But we must not be taken in by this apparent interchange. Despite appearances, we must not imagine that certain of the historical disciplines have moved from the continuous to the discontinuous, while others have moved from the tangled mass of discontinuities to the great, uninterrupted unities; we must not imagine that in the analysis of politics, institutions, or economics, we have become more and more sensitive to overall determinations, while in the analysis of ideas and of knowledge, we are paying more and more attention to the play of difference; we must not imagine that these two great forms of description have crossed without recognizing one another. In fact, the same problems are being posed in either case, but they have provoked opposite effects on the surface. These problems may be summed up in a word: the questioning of the document. Of course, it is obvious enough that ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions; scholars have asked not only what these documents meant, but also whether they were telling the truth. and by what right they could claim to he doing so, whether they were sincere or deliberately misleading, well informed or ignorant, authentic or tampered with. But each of these questions, and all this critical concetn, pointed to one and the same end: the reconstitution, on the basis of what the documents say, and sometimes merely hint at, of the past from which they emanate and which has now disappeared far behind them; the document was always treated as the language of a voice since reduced to silence, its fragile, but possibly decipherable trace. Now, through a mutation that is not of very recent origin, but which has still not come to an end, history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, i s n o longer for history an inert material through which

it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations. History must be detached from the image that satisfied it for so long, and through which it found its anthropological justification: that of an age-old collective consciousness that made use of material documents to refresh its memory; history is the work expended on material documentation (books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc.) that exists, in every time and place, in every society, either in a spontaneous or in a consciously organized form. The document is not the fortunate tool of a history that is primarily and fundamentally memory; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked. To be brief, then, let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument.

This has several consequences. First of all, there is the surface effect already mentioned: the proliferation of discontinuities in the history of ideas, and the emergence of long periods in history proper. In fact, in its traditional form, history proper was concerned to define relations (of simple causality, of circular determination, of antagonism, of expression) between facts or dated events: the series being known, it was simply a question of defining the position of each element in relation to the other

elements in the series. The problem now is to constitute series: to define the elements proper to each series, to fix its boundaries, to reveal its own specific type of relations, to formulate its laws, and, beyond this, to describe the relations between different series, thus constituting series of series, or 'tables' : hence the ever-increasing number of strata, and the need to distinguish them, the specificity of their time and chronologies; hence the need to distinguish not only important events (with a long chain of consequences) and less important ones, but types of events at quite different levels (some very brief, others of average duration, like the development of a particular technique, or a scarcity of money, and others of a long-term nature, like a demographic equilibrium or the gradual adjustment of an economy to climatic change); hence the possibility of revealing series with widely spaced intervals formed by rare or repetitive events. The appearance of long periods in the history of today is not a return to the philosophers of history, to the great ages of the world, or to the periodization dictated by the rise and fall of civilizations; it is the effect of the methodologically concerted development of series. In the history of ideas, of thought and of the sciences, the same mutation has brought about the opposite effect; it has broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness, or the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought; it has questioned the themes of convergence and culmination; it has doubted the possibility of creating totalities. It has led to the individualization of different series, which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema. Thus, in place of the continuous chronology of reason, which was invariably traced back to some inaccessible origin, there have appeared scales that are sometimes very brief, distinct from one another, irreducible to a single law, scales that bear a type of history peculiar to each one, and which cannot be reduced to the general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses, and remembers.

general model of a consciousness that acquires, progresses, and remembers. Second consequence: the notion of discontinuity assumes a major role in the historical disciplines. For history in its classical form,

the discontinuous was both the given and the unthinkable: the raw material of history, which presented itself in the form of dispersed events - decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries; the material, which, through analysis, had to be rearranged, reduced, effaced in order to reveal the continuity of events. Discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis. Its role is threefold. First, it constitutes a deliberate operation on the part of the historian (and not a quality of the material with which he has to deal) : for he must, at least as a systematic hypothesis, distinguish the possible levels of analysis, the methods proper to each, and the periodization that best suits them. Secondly, it is the result of his description (and not something that must be eliminated by means of his analysis) : for he is trying to discover the limits of a process, the point of inflexion of a curve, the inversion of a regulatory movement, the boundaries of an oscillation, the threshold of a function, the instant at which a circular causality breaks down. Thirdly, it is the concept that the historian's work never ceases to specify (instead of neglecting it as a uniform, indifferent blank between two positive figures); it assumes a specific form and function according to the field and the level to which it is assigned: one does not speak of the same discontinuity when describing an epistemological threshold, the point of reflexion in a population curve, or the replacement of one technique by another. The notion of discontinuity is a paradoxical one: because it is both an instrument and an object of research; because it divides up the field of which it is the effect; because it enables the historian to individualize different domains but can be established only by comparing those domains. And because, in the final analysis, perhaps, it is not simply a concept present in the discourse of the historian, but something that the historian secretly supposes to be present: on what basis, in fact, could he speak without this discontinuity that offers him history - and his own history - as an object? One of the most essential features of the new history is probably this displacement of the discontinuous: its transference from the obstacle to the work itself; its integration into the discourse of the historian, where it no longer plays the role of an external condition that must be reduced, but that of a

working concept; and therefore the inversion of signs by which it is no longer the negative of the historical reading (its underside, its failure, the limit of its power), but the positive element that determines its object and validates its analysis. Third consequence: the theme and the possibility of a total history begin to disappear, and we see the emergence of something very different that might be called a general history. The project of a total history is one that seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle - material or spiritual - of a society, the significance common to all the phenomena of a period, the law that accounts for their cohesion - what is called metaphorically the 'face' of a period. Such a project is linked to two or three hypotheses; it is supposed that between all the events of a welldefined spatio-temporal area, between all the phenomena of which traces have been found, it must be possible to establish a system of homogeneous relations: a network of causality that makes it possible to derive each of them, relations of analogy that show how they symbolize one another, or how they all express one and the same central core; it is also supposed that one and the same form of historicity operates upon economic structures, social institutions and customs, the inertia of mental attitudes, technological practice, political behaviour, and subjects them all to the same type of transformation; lastly, it is supposed that history itself may be articulated into great units - stages or phases - which contain within themselves their own principle of cohesion. These are the postulates that are challenged by the new history when it speaks of series, divisions, limits, differences of level, shifts, chronological specificities, particular forms of rehandling, possible types of relation. This is not because it is trying to obtain a plurality of histories juxtaposed and independent of one another: that of the economy beside that of institutions, and beside these two those of science, religion, or literature; nor is it because it is merely trying to discover between these different histories coincidences of dates, or analogies of form and meaning. The problem that now presents itself- and which defmes the task of a general history -is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series; what vertical system they are capable of forming; what interplay of correlation and dominance exists between them; what may be the

effect of shifts, different temporalities, and various rehandlings; in what distinct totalities certain elements may figure simultaneously; in short, not only what series, but also what 'series of series' -or, in other words, what 'tables' it is possible to draw up. A total description draws all phenomena around a single centre - a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view. an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion.

10.2 FROM ARCHAEOLOGY TO GENEALOGY

Foucault explicitly presents The Order of Things as an “archaeological” approach to the history of thought. Three years later, in 1969, he published The Archaeology of Knowledge, a methodological treatise that explicitly formulates what he took to be the archaeological method that he used not only in The Order of Things but also (at least implicitly) in History of Madness and The Birth of the Clinic. The key idea of the archaeological method is that systems of thought and knowledge (epistemes or discursive formations, in Foucault’s terminology) are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. So, for example, History of Madness should, Foucault maintained, be read as an intellectual excavation of the radically different discursive formations that governed talk and thought about madness from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.

Archaeology was an essential method for Foucault because it supported a historiography that did not rest on the primacy of the consciousness of individual subjects; it allowed the historian of thought to operate at an unconscious level that displaced the primacy of the subject found in both phenomenology and in traditional historiography. However, archaeology’s critical force was restricted to the comparison of the discursive formations of different periods. Such comparisons could suggest the contingency of a given way of thinking by showing that the people living in previous ages had thought very differently (and,

apparently, just as effectively). But mere archaeological analysis could say nothing about the causes of the transition from one way of thinking to another and so had to ignore perhaps the most forceful case for the contingency of entrenched contemporary positions. Genealogy, the new method first deployed in Discipline and Punish, was intended to remedy this deficiency.

Foucault intended the term “genealogy” to evoke Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals, particularly with its suggestion of complex, mundane, inglorious origins—in no way part of any grand scheme of progressive history. The point of a genealogical analysis is to show that a given system of thought (itself uncovered in its essential structures by archaeology, which therefore remains part of Foucault’s historiography) was the result of contingent turns of history, not the outcome of rationally inevitable trends.

10.3 HISTORY OF THE PRISON

Discipline and Punish, published in 1975, is a genealogical study of the development of the “gentler” modern way of imprisoning criminals rather than torturing or killing them. While recognizing the element of genuinely enlightened reform, Foucault particularly emphasizes how such reform also becomes a vehicle of more effective control: “to punish less, perhaps; but certainly to punish better”. He further argues that the new mode of punishment becomes the model for control of an entire society, with factories, hospitals, and schools modeled on the modern prison. We should not, however, think that the deployment of this model was due to the explicit decisions of some central controlling agency. Foucault’s analysis shows how techniques and institutions, developed for different and often quite innocuous purposes, converged to create the modern system of disciplinary power.

At the core of Foucault’s picture of modern disciplinary society are three primary techniques of control: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. To a great extent, control over people (power) can be achieved merely by observing them. So, for example, the

tiered rows of seats in a stadium not only makes it easy for spectators to see but also for guards or security cameras to scan the audience. A perfect system of observation would allow one "guard" to see everything (a situation approximated, as we shall see, in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon). But since this is not usually possible, there is a need for "relays" of observers, hierarchically ordered, through whom observed data passes from lower to higher levels.

A distinctive feature of modern power (disciplinary control) is its concern with what people have not done (nonobservence), with, that is, a person's failure to reach required standards. This concern illustrates the primary function of modern disciplinary systems: to correct deviant behavior. The main goal is not revenge (as in the case of the tortures of premodern punishment) but reform, where reform means primarily coming to live by society's standards or norms. Discipline through imposing precise and detailed norms ("normalization") is quite different from the older system of judicial punishment, which merely judges each action as allowed by the law or not allowed by the law and does not say that those judged are "normal" or "abnormal". This idea of normalization is pervasive in our society: e.g., national standards for educational programs, for medical practice, for industrial processes and products.

The examination (for example, of students in schools, of patients in hospitals) is a method of control that combines hierarchical observation with normalizing judgment. It is a prime example of what Foucault calls power/knowledge, since it combines into a unified whole "the deployment of force and the establishment of truth" (1975 [1977: 184]). It both elicits the truth about those who undergo the examination (tells what they know or what is the state of their health) and controls their behavior (by forcing them to study or directing them to a course of treatment).

On Foucault's account, the relation of power and knowledge is far closer than in the familiar Baconian engineering model, for which "knowledge is power" means that knowledge is an instrument of power, although the

two exist quite independently. Foucault's point is rather that, at least for the study of human beings, the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know.

The examination also situates individuals in a "field of documentation". The results of exams are recorded in documents that provide detailed information about the individuals examined and allow power systems to control them (e.g., absentee records for schools, patients' charts in hospitals). On the basis of these records, those in control can formulate categories, averages, and norms that are in turn a basis for knowledge. The examination turns the individual into a "case"—in both senses of the term: a scientific example and an object of care. Caring is always also an opportunity for control.

Bentham's Panopticon is, for Foucault, a paradigmatic architectural model of modern disciplinary power. It is a design for a prison, built so that each inmate is separated from and invisible to all the others (in separate "cells") and each inmate is always visible to a monitor situated in a central tower. Monitors do not in fact always see each inmate; the point is that they could at any time. Since inmates never know whether they are being observed, they must behave as if they are always seen and observed. As a result, control is achieved more by the possibility of internal monitoring of those controlled than by actual supervision or heavy physical constraints.

The principle of the Panopticon can be applied not only to prisons but also to any system of disciplinary power (a factory, a hospital, a school). And, in fact, although Bentham himself was never able to build it, its principle has come to pervade aspects of modern society. It is the instrument through which modern discipline has been able to replace pre-modern sovereignty (kings, judges) as the fundamental power relation.

Foucault's genealogy follows Nietzsche as well as existential phenomenology in that it aims to bring the body into the focus of history.

Rather than histories of mentalities or ideas, genealogies are "histories of the body". They examine the historical practices through which the body becomes an object of techniques and deployments of power. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault shows how disciplinary techniques produce "docile bodies": bodies of prisoners, soldiers, workers and schoolchildren were subjected to disciplinary power in order to make them more useful and at the same time easier to control. The human body became a machine the functioning of which could be optimized, calculated, and improved. Its functions, movements and capabilities were broken down into narrow segments, analyzed in detail and recomposed in a maximally effective way.

By historicizing the body, Foucault's genealogies also have distinctive philosophical implications. They question the naturalistic explanatory framework that understands human nature—uncovered by science—as the basis for such complex areas of behavior as sexuality, insanity or criminality. A key idea in Foucault's historical analysis of the modern penal institutions is that they operate with markedly different rationality than those that are aimed solely at retribution through pain. He effectively reveals the double role of the present system: it aims at both punishing and correcting, and therefore it mixes juridical and scientific practices. Foucault argued that the intervention of criminal psychiatry in the field of law that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example, was part of the gradual shift in penal practice from a focus on the crime to a focus on the criminal, from the action to agency and personality. The new idea of the "dangerous individual" referred to the danger potentially inherent in the criminal person. The new rationality could not function in an effective way in the existing system without the emergence of new forms of scientific knowledge such as criminal psychiatry that enabled the characterization of criminals in themselves, beneath their acts. Foucault suggests that this shift resulted in the emergence of new, insidious forms of domination and violence. The critical impact of Discipline and Punish thus lies in its ability to reveal the processes of subject formation that operate in modern penal institutions. The modern prison does not just punish by depriving its

inmates of liberty, it categorizes them as delinquent subjects, types of people with a dangerous, criminal nature.

10.4 HISTORY OF MODERN SEXUALITY

Foucault's history of sexuality was originally projected as a fairly straightforward extension of the genealogical approach of Discipline and Punish to the topic of sexuality. Foucault's idea is that the various modern fields of knowledge about sexuality (various "sciences of sexuality", including psychoanalysis) have an intimate association with the power structures of modern society and so are prime candidates for genealogical analysis. The first volume of this project, published in 1976, was intended as the introduction to a series of studies on particular aspects of modern sexuality (children, women, "perverts", population, etc.). It outlined the project of the overall history, explaining the basic viewpoint and the methods to be used.

On Foucault's account, modern control of sexuality parallels modern control of criminality by making sex (like crime) an object of allegedly scientific disciplines, which simultaneously offer knowledge and domination of their objects. However, it becomes apparent that there is a further dimension in the power associated with the sciences of sexuality. Not only is there control exercised via other people's knowledge of individuals such as doctors' knowledge, for example; there is also control via individuals' knowledge of themselves. Individuals internalize the norms laid down by the sciences of sexuality and monitor themselves in an effort to conform to these norms. Thus, they are controlled not only as objects of disciplines but also as self-scrutinizing and self-forming subjects.

Foucault shows how sexuality becomes an essential construct in determining not only moral worth, but also health, desire, and identity. Subjects are further obligated to tell the truth about themselves by confessing the details of their sexuality. Foucault argued that modern sexuality was characterized by the secularization of religious techniques of confession: one no longer confesses the details of one's sexual desire

to a priest; one goes to a doctor, a therapist, a psychologist, or a psychiatrist.

The book begins with a repudiation of the “repressive hypothesis”, the idea that sexuality in the Victorian era was repressed and discourse on it silenced. Foucault claims that it was not repression that characterized the primary attitude of modern society towards sex; rather, sexuality became the object of new kinds of discourse—medical, juridical and psychological -– and that discourse on it actually increased. Sexuality was inextricably linked to truth: these new discourses were able to tell us the scientific truth about ourselves through our sexuality.

Although the book is a historical study of the emergence of modern sexuality in the nineteenth century, Foucault’s targets were also contemporary ideas and practices. The prevalent views on sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s held that there was a natural and healthy sexuality that all human beings shared simply in virtue of being human, and this sexuality was presently repressed by cultural prohibitions and conventions such as bourgeois morality and capitalist socio-economic structures. Repressed sexuality was the cause of various neuroses and it was important to have an active and free sexuality. The popular discourse on sexuality thus fervently argued for sexual liberation: we had to liberate our true sexuality from the repressive mechanisms of power.

Foucault challenged this view by showing how our conceptions and experiences of sexuality are in fact always the result of specific cultural conventions and mechanisms of power and could not exist independently of them. The mission to liberate our repressed sexuality was thus fundamentally misguided because there was no authentic or natural sexuality to liberate. To free oneself from one set of norms only meant adopting different norms in their stead, and that could turn out to be just as controlling and normalizing. He wrote mockingly that the irony of our endless preoccupation with sexuality was that we believed that it had something to do with our liberation.

In order to challenge the dominant view of the relationship between sexuality and repressive power, Foucault had to re-conceive the nature of power. His major claim is that power is not essentially repressive but productive. It does not operate by repressing and prohibiting the true and authentic expressions of a natural sexuality. Instead it produces, through cultural normative practices and scientific discourses, the ways in which we experience and conceive of our sexuality. Power relations are “the internal conditions” of our sexual identities.

Foucault outlined what became one of the most influential contemporary understandings of power in a series of short propositions over three pages of The History of Sexuality, Volume 1. He elucidated and developed this understanding of power in a number of essays, lectures and interviews throughout the rest of his life, but the basic idea was already present in these pages. We should not try to look for the center of power, or for the individuals, institutions or classes that rule, but should rather construct a “microphysics of power” that focuses on the multitude of loci of power spread throughout a society: families, workplaces, everyday practices, and marginal institutions. One has to analyze power relations from the bottom up and not from the top down, and to study the myriad ways in which the subjects themselves are constituted in these diverse but intersecting networks.

Although dispersed among various interlacing networks throughout society, power nevertheless has a rationality, a series of aims and objectives, and the means of attaining them. This does not imply that any individual has consciously formulated them. As the example of the Panopticon shows, power often functions according to a clear rationality irrespective of the intentions and motives of the individual who guards the prison from the tower. Despite the centrality of the Panopticon as a model for power, Foucault does not hold that power forms a deterministic system of overbearing constraints. Power should rather be understood and analyzed as an unstable network of practices implying that where there is power, there is always resistance too. Just as there is no center of power, there is no center of resistance somewhere outside of

it. Resistance is rather inherent in power relations and their dynamics, it is "the odd term in the relations of power" (1976 [1978: 96]). While power relations permeate the whole body of society, they may be denser in some regions and less dense in others.

Foucault's short but influential discussion of biopower also first appears at the end of The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1. Foucault contrasts it to what he calls sovereign power: a form of power that was historically founded on violence—the right to kill. It was exercised mainly by "deduction" (taking something away): it consisted of the right to appropriate a portion of the nation's wealth, for example by imposing a tax on products, goods and services, or by demanding a portion of the subjects' time, strength, and ultimately life itself. The obligation to wage war on behalf of the sovereign and the imposition of death penalty for going against his will were the clearest forms of such power. But Foucault claims that the West has undergone a profound transformation in its mechanisms of power since the seventeenth century. Deductive and violent sovereign power has been gradually complemented and partly replaced by biopower, a form of power that exerts a positive influence on life, "that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (1976 [1978: 137]). This era of biopower is marked by the explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the control of populations: techniques that, for example, coordinate medical care, normalize behavior, rationalize mechanisms of insurance, and rethink urban planning. The aim is the effective administration of bodies and the calculated management of life through means that are scientific and continuous. Mechanisms of power and knowledge have assumed responsibility for the life process in order to optimize, control, and modify it. The exercise of power over living beings no longer carries the threat of death, but instead takes charge of their lives.

The rationality of biopower is markedly different from that of sovereign power in terms not just of its objectives, but also of its instruments. A major consequence of its development is the growing importance of

norms at the expense of the juridical system of the law. Foucault claims that the dominance of biopower as the paradigmatic form of power means that we live in a society in which the power of the law has subsided in favor of regulative and corrective mechanisms based on scientific knowledge. Biopower penetrates traditional forms of political power, but it is essentially the power of experts and administrators.

The genealogical attempt to historicize the body is prominent also in The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, but now Foucault's target is the naturalist explanations of sex and sexuality. At the end of the book Foucault takes up the question of whether we can find a scientific truth about sex. He makes clear that his genealogical investigation of sexuality implies a challenge to a certain kind of explanatory framework of sexuality and gender: the idea of sex as a natural foundation or an unobserved cause, which supports the visible effects of gender and sexuality. He critically appraises the idea of a natural, scientifically defined true sex by revealing the historical development of this form of thought. He does not claim that sex, understood as the categories of maleness and femaleness, was invented in a particular historical period. He rather analyses the ways in which these categories were founded and explained in discourses claiming the status of scientific truth, and how this allegedly "pure" explanation in fact constituted these categories so that they were understood as "natural". This idea has had enormous influence on feminist philosophers and queer theorists. Judith Butler has appropriated this idea in her influential book Gender Trouble to argue that allegedly scientific ideas of sex as a natural and necessary ground for sexual and gendered identities in fact have a normative function: they constitute our conceptions of "normal" men and women and their "natural" sexual desire for each other.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What do you know the changes from Archaeology to Genealogy?

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2. What do you know the History of the Prison?

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3. What do you know the History of Modern Sexuality?

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10.5 SEX IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Foucault's final engagement with traditional philosophy arises from the turn toward the ancient world he took in the last few years of his life. The History of Sexuality had been planned as a multi-volume work on various themes in a study of modern sexuality. The first volume, discussed above, was a general introduction. Foucault wrote a second volume (Les aveux de la chair) that dealt with the origins of the modern notion of the subject in the practices of Christian confession, but he never published it. (It was published posthumously in 2018.) His concern was that a proper understanding of the Christian development required a comparison with ancient conceptions of the ethical self, something he undertook in his last two books (1984) on Greek and Roman sexuality: The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self.

These treatments of ancient sexuality moved Foucault into ethical issues that had been implicit but seldom explicitly thematized in his earlier writings. What emerges out of his historical studies of ancient sexuality is a particular conception of ethics that he traces to antiquity. In the ancient conception, ethics referred to the practice through which one forms oneself as an ethical subject following the prescriptive elements of morality. It concerns the way in which moral rules can be adopted and problematized by the subjects themselves.

The importance of a study of ethics becomes apparent when we try to make visible the difference between the morality of antiquity and that of Christianity. Foucault's specific goal was to compare ancient pagan and Christian ethics through the test-case of sexuality and to trace the development of Christian ideas about sex from the very different ideas of the ancients. He argues that, contrary to what is often believed, on the level of moral codes of behavior, there are in fact striking similarities between antiquity and Christianity. Both shared, for example, a concern that sexual expenditure could harm an individual's health, and they both valued conjugal fidelity and sexual abstinence. But there was a strong contrast in the ways these two cultures understood and practiced these ideals and demands.

In the Christian view sexual acts were, on the whole, evil in themselves and most forms of sexual activity were simply forbidden. A main emphasis in Christian morality is therefore on the moral code, its systematicity, its richness, and its capacity to adjust to every possible case and to embrace every area of behavior. The rules in Christian monasteries, for example, were not only very severe, but also extremely detailed. The morality of antiquity, on the other hand, is one in which the code and rules of behavior are rudimentary. The ancient Greeks' view was that sexual acts were natural and necessary, but subject to abuse. They emphasized the proper use (chresis) of pleasures, where this involved engaging in a range of sexual activities (heterosexual, homosexual, in marriage, out of marriage), but with proper moderation. Their texts discussing morality therefore lay down very few explicit rules

or guidelines on the kinds of sexual acts that one should engage in. More important than the moral rules was the relationship that one had with oneself, the choice of the "style of existence" made by the individual. Sexual austerity, for example, was not practiced as a result of prohibitions, but because of a personal choice to live a beautiful life and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence. Sex for the Greeks was a major part of what Foucault called an "aesthetics of existence": the self's creation of a beautiful and enjoyable existence.

Foucault's last two books are an attempt to make a contribution to the task of rethinking ethics, but they are also a continuation of his attempt to rethink the subject. Now the focus is on the forms of understanding that subjects create about themselves and the practices by which they transform their mode of being. In his study of ancient Greek ethics, Foucault continued to pursue his idea that there was no true self that could be deciphered and emancipated, but that the self was something that had been—and must be—created. There is, however, a whole new axis of analysis present in his late studies of the subject. While his earlier genealogical studies investigated the ways in which power/knowledge networks constituted the subject, his late work emphasizes the subject's own role in this process. It therefore offers a more complex understanding of the subject. Subjects are not simply constructed by power; they themselves partake in that construction and modify themselves through practices of the self. They are not just docile bodies, but actively refuse, adopt and alter forms of being a subject. One way of contesting normalizing power is by shaping oneself and one's lifestyle creatively: by exploring opportunities for new ways of being, new fields of experience, pleasures, relationships, modes of living and thinking.

10.6 FOUCAULT AFTER FOUCAULT

Foucault left instructions that there should be no posthumous publication of his writings that he had not published in his lifetime. But Foucault had allowed taping of his lectures, and his estate decided that this amounted to permission to publish edited versions of his public lectures based on his notes and tape recordings. This decision has allowed print editions of

the annual courses of lectures that he delivered at the Collège de France from 1970–71 through 1983–84 (except for a sabbatical year in 1976–77) as well as other lectures he gave in different universities around the world. This has made an enormous body of important material available. Some of it covers work later published, but some presents ideas that appear nowhere else.

The lecture series Security, Territory, Population (1977–1978) and The Birth of Biopolitics (1978–1979) have been especially influential and introduce Foucault's ideas on government and governmentality. "Government" becomes Foucault's preferred term for power, while "governmentality" functions as his main theoretical tool for analyzing its rationality, techniques, and procedures in the modern world.

Foucault shows that while government historically referred to a wide range of practices, from religious guidance of the soul to ruling over a territory and its inhabitants, in the context of the modern state it has come to mean governing a population. Population as the object of modern forms of government both required and encouraged the development of specific forms of knowledge such as statistical analysis as well as macro-economic and bio-scientific knowledge. The modern state had to take care of the life and the wellbeing of its population, and Foucault therefore calls the politics of the modern state biopolitics.

In Foucault's original formulation, the term "governmentality" referred to the specific historical development of the essentially modern, complex techniques of power that focused on the population. Later Foucault also gave the term a more general meaning as "the way in which one conducts the conduct of men". His key claim was that to understand the practice of government in this broad sense of controlling people's conduct, one had to study the specific technologies of power, but also the rationality underpinning them. The practices and institutions of government are always enabled, regulated, and justified by a specific form of reasoning or rationality that defines their ends and the suitable means of achieving them. To understand power as a set of relations, as Foucault repeatedly

suggested, means understanding how such relations are rationalized. It means examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices and systems of practices, and what role they play within them.

The exposition and analysis of the historically changing governmental rationalities was a pivotal goal of Foucault's lectures. His analysis makes clear that modern governmental rationality has two major features. On the one hand, the development of the modern state is characterized by the centralization of political power: a centralized state with highly organized administration and bureaucracy has emerged. While this feature is commonly analyzed and also criticized in political thought, Foucault also identifies the evolution of a second feature that appears to be antagonistic to this development. He claims that the modern state is also characterized by individualizing power—or "pastoral power" as he also calls it. This is power that relies on individualizing knowledge about a person' life. The modern state required the development of power technologies oriented towards individuals in an attempt to govern their conduct in a continuous and permanent way. The result is the intervention of the state in the everyday life of individuals for example, their diet, mental health, and sexual practices.

The analysis of governmentality does not replace Foucault's earlier understanding of power. His method of analysis is similar to the one he used to study the techniques and practices of power in the context of particular, local institutions such as the prison. What had to be analyzed, but also questioned, were the historically specific rationalities intrinsic to practices. At the same time, Foucault's analysis of governmentality adds new and important dimensions to his understanding of power. While his studies of disciplinary power were restricted to specialized institutional contexts, with the notion of government he was able to study larger, strategic developments beyond the scope of his "microphysics of power". He was able to transfer his understanding of power to domains such as the state that were traditionally regarded as objects of political theory. With the idea of power as government, Foucault was also able to clarify his understanding of resistance. Because government refers to strategic,

regulated and rationalized modes of power that have to be legitimized through forms of knowledge, the idea of critique as a form of resistance now becomes crucial. To govern is not to physically determine the conduct of passive objects. Government involves offering reasons why those governed should do what they are told, and this implies that they can also question these reasons. Foucault claims that this is why governmentality has historically developed in tandem with the practice of political critique. The practice of critique must question the reasons for governing like that: the legitimate principles, procedures and means of governing.

In the lecture series The Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault also engages in a lengthy examination of neoliberal governmentality. This analysis has become seminal for contemporary political theory. Many political commentators now see the year 1979, when Foucault delivered his lectures, as the inauguration of the dominance of neoliberal economic policy in Europe and the United States. Almost forty years after its expanding application, Foucault's topic and his insights appear farsighted. His analysis of neoliberalism is distinctive in at least two significant ways. First, he analyzes neoliberalism as a historically novel form of governmentality—a rationality of governing connected with specific technologies of power. On Foucault's account neoliberalism is not understood just as an economic doctrine, but as a governmental form that is directed toward specific objectives, regulates itself through continuous reflection, and, essentially, aims to ensure that capitalism works. It comprises a coherent political ontology, a set of philosophical background beliefs about the nature of society, markets, and human beings. However, it is not an ideology in the sense of consisting only of ideas or false beliefs. Its political ontology necessitates and rationalizes a specific technology of power—specific practices of governing, as well as a particular way of reflecting on and problematizing these practices.

Foucault also emphasizes that neoliberal governmentality should be viewed as a particular way of producing subjects: it produces an economic subject structured by specific tendencies, preferences, and

motivations. It aims to create social conditions that not only encourage and necessitate competitiveness and self-interest, but also produce them. Foucault discusses the work of the American neoliberal economists, in particular Gary Becker and his theory of human capital, in order to show how neoliberal subjects are understood as navigating the social realm by constantly making rational choices based on economic knowledge and the strict calculation of the necessary costs and desired benefits. Such subjects must make long-term and short-term investments in different aspects of their lives and acquire sufficient economic knowledge to be able to calculate costs, risks, and possible returns on the capital invested.

Foucault never published any of the material developed in these two lecture series, and in the lectures in the 1980s he turned to examine texts from ancient philosophy. Many of the ideas developed there were later published as The Use of Pleasure and Care of the Self. His studies of ancient sexuality, and, particularly, the idea of an aesthetics of existence also led him to the ancient idea of philosophy as a way of life rather than a search for theoretical truth. Although The Use of Pleasure has some discussion of Plato's conception of philosophy, Foucault's treatments of the topic are primarily in lectures that he had no time to develop for publication. Some of these lectures discuss Socrates (in the Apology and in Alcibiades I) as both a model and an exponent of a philosophical life focused on "care of the self" and follow the subsequent ancient discussions of this topic in, for example, Epictetus, Seneca, and Plutarch. Other lectures deal with the ancient ideal of "truthful speaking" (parrhesia), regarded as a central political and moral virtue. Here Foucault discusses earlier formulations of the notion, in Euripides and Socrates, as well as its later transformations by the Epicureans, Stoics, and Cynics. This research project might have been the most fruitful of all Foucault's engagements with traditional philosophy. But his early death in 1984 prevented him from completing it.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Sex in the Ancient World.

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2. How to find the relation Foucault after Foucault?

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10.7 LET US SUM UP

Then different levels. An intrinsic archaeological contradiction is not a fact, purely and simply, that it is enough to state as a principle or explain as an effect. It is a complex phenomenon that is distributed over different levels of the discursive formation. Thus, for systematic Natural History and methodical Natural History, which were in constant opposition for a good part of the eighteenth century, one can recognize : an inadequate of the objects (in the one case one describes the general appearance of the plant; in the other certain predetermined variables; in the one case, one describes the totality of the plant, or at least its most important parts, in the other one describes a number of elements chosen arbitrarily for their taxonomic convenience; sometimes one takes account of the plant's different states of growth and maturity, at others one confines one's attention to a single moment, a stage of optimum visibility); a divergence of enunciatively modalities (in the case of the systematic analysis of plants, one applies a rigorous perceptual and linguistic code, and in accordance with a constant scale; for methodical description, the codes are relatively free, and the scales of mapping may oscillate) ; an incompatibility of concepts (in the 'systems', the concept of generic

character is an arbitrary, though misleading mark to designate the genera; in the methods this same concept must include the real definition of the genus); lastly, an exclusion of theoretical options (systematic taxonomy makes 'fixism' possible, even it is rectified by the idea of a continuous creation in time, gradually unfolding the clements of the tables, or by the idea of natural catastrophes having disturbed by our present gaze the linear order of natural proximities, but excludes the possibility of a transformation that the method accepts without absolutely implying it). Functions. These forms of opposition do not all play the same role in discursive practice: they are not, in a homogeneous way, obstacles to overcome or a principle of growth. In any case, it is not enough to seek in them the cause either of the deceleration or the acceleration of history; time is not introduced into the truth and ideality of discourse on the basis of the empty, general form of opposition. These oppositions are always particular functional stages. Some of them bring about an additional development of the enunciative field: they open up sequences of argumentation, experiment, verification, and various inferences; they make possible the determination of new objects, they arouse new enunciative modalities, they define new concepts or modify the field of application of those that already exist: but without anything being modified in the system of positivity of the discourse (this was the case in the discussions of the eighteenth-century naturalists on the frontier between the mineral and the vegetal, or on the boundaries of life or nature and the origin of fossils); such additive processes may remain decisively open or closed by a demonstration that refutes them or a discovery that puts them out of operation.

Others induce a reorganization of the discursive field: they pose the question of the possible translation of one group of statements into another, of the point of coherence that might articulate one on another, of their integration in a more general space (thus the system/method opposition among eighteenth-century naturalists induces a series of attempts to recreate both of them in a single form of description, to give to the method the rigour and regularity of the system, to coincide the arbitrariness of the system with the concrete analyses of the method);

they are not new objects, new concepts, new enunciate modalities that are added in a linear fashion to the old; but objects of another (more general or more particular) level, concepts that have another structure and another field of application, enunciations of another type, without, however, altering the rules of formation. Other oppositions play a critical role: they put into operation the existence of the ' acceptability' of the discursive practice; they define the point of its effective impossibility and of its historical reflexing (thus the description, in Natural History itself, of organic similarities and functions that operate, through anatomical variables, in define conditions of existence, no longer permits, as an autonomous discursive formation at least, a Natural History that is a taxonomic science of beings on the basis of their visible characters).

10.8 KEY WORDS

Archaeology: Archaeology, or archeology, is the study of human activity through the recovery and analysis of material culture. The archaeological record consists of artifacts, architecture, biofacts or ecofacts and cultural landscapes. Archaeology can be considered both a social science and a branch of the humanities.

Genealogy: Genealogy is the study of families, family history, and the tracing of their lineages. Genealogists use oral interviews, historical records, genetic analysis, and other records to obtain information about a family and to demonstrate kinship and pedigrees of its members.

10.9 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What do you know the changes from Archaeology to Genealogy?
2. What do you know the History of the Prison?
3. What do you know the History of Modern Sexuality?
4. Discuss the Sex in the Ancient World.
5. How to find the relation Foucault after Foucault?

10.10 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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- 1972, L'histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, Paris: Gallimard (first published as Folie et déraison, Paris: Plon, 1961). Translated as History of Madness, Jean Khalfa (ed.), Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (trans.), New York: Routledge, 2006.
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- Cours au Collège de France, 1970–1984, François Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (eds), Paris: Gallimard, 1997–2015. Translated as Lectures at the Collège de France, Arnold Davidson (ed.), Graham Burchell (trans.), 2003ff.

10.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 10.2
2. See Section 10.3
3. See Section 10.4

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 10.5
2. See Section 10.6

UNIT 11: PHILOSOPHY OF GENDER

STRUCTURE

11.0 Objectives

11.1 Introduction

11.2 Foundations of Science

11.3 Science, Modernity and Sociology

11.4 Rethinking Science

11.5 Crisis in Foundation

11.6 Let us sum up

11.7 Key Words

11.8 Questions for Review

11.9 Suggested readings and references

11.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the diverse philosophical influences on sociology and gender;
- Discuss the major currents of thinking in sociology like the positivist tradition and interpretative thinking;
- Describe how Enlightenment and the project of modernity were idealized in sociology; and
- Discuss how notions of modernity were shattered by the post-modernist critique.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Social science or, to put it more specifically, sociology is a formal body of knowledge that has grown, evolved, created a community of scholars, and established a distinctive tradition of learning. This is possible because it has a method, a set of principles or guidelines for observing the social reality, and constructing a systematic body of knowledge. In other words, it has a philosophy. You can make out that here we are using the word philosophy not in the metaphysical or spiritual sense of

Notes

the term. By philosophy we mean a way of seeing and observing, a way of thinking, arguing and arriving at truth. It is, therefore, important to understand the philosophy of social science. Only then can you comprehend how social scientists think, argue and construct the knowledge of society, and how it differs from the other branches of knowledge. A couple of examples would make it clear. You may have read epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These are extraordinarily rich narratives that give you a glimpse of social history. But then, when modern historians write the history of the ancient period, their way of constructing history is qualitatively different from these epics. They may have used these epics as possible sources, but they are not storytellers, their goal is not to adore, glorify or condemn certain characters, or methologize the past. They seek to remain „neutral", rely on all possible facts, and write about the politico-economic life, social formations, tools and technologies used in the given period. Modern history, it is therefore argued, is not fiction, or a narrative, or mythical account. Instead, it is a kind of science based on hard facts and empirical evidence. Likewise, when M.N. Srinivas (1966) came forward with the notion of „Sanskritization", a process that indicates how the lower castes emulate the norms, values, practices of the forward castes, it was based on hard empirical evidence. It was, therefore, different from the textual account of the rigid and immobile caste system. In other words, the sociological reading of caste, which is based on a field view, is qualitatively different from the way it is being seen in the scriptures.

As a matter of fact, mythologies, folk tales, epics, travelogues and literature are innumerable sources from which we come to know about human society. But what gives a distinctive identity to modern social science are its philosophy, its method of enquiry, and its ways of acquiring knowledge. No wonder you often say that history is not mythology, cultural anthropology is not travelogue, sociology is not journalism, and political science is not an election speech. This is not to suggest that mythology and travelogue, or journalism and election speeches are domains of falsehood. The point we are trying to make is that the methodology of social science is qualitatively different. It is a

formal, structured body of knowledge having its own technical idioms and vocabulary, and distinctive ways of collecting data and arriving at generalizations. Social scientists, it is argued, are "objective" and "value-neutral"; they rely on hard empirical facts, and the social science account is, therefore, not an ideological, subjective, valorization or condemnation of social reality. It is often believed that understanding this methodology is like comprehending the very philosophy of modern science that gave an identity to social science. In this Unit you would learn about this intellectual trajectory: how modern social sciences grew and evolved.

11.2 FOUNDATIONS OF SCIENCE

We call it social science. But what is science? Science, you often tend tobelieve, is objective. Science is based on facts; science needs rational and dispassionate analysis, not an emotional or sentimental judgment. In order to make sense of the philosophic roots of modern science, we would briefly refer to two distinguished thinkers, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene Descartes (1564-1650), because it is generally agreed that their contributions in the seventeenth century provided the foundations of modern science.Bacon taught us the first important lesson of objectivity:how to spellout the book of nature as it is how to observe it without any preselection and bias. For Bacon, there are many delusions that act as obstacles and divert us from truth. As a result, we confuse the reality with our own subjective idea of it. We must overcome all these delusions that Bacon regarded as the „idols of mind‟. There are four species of idols that Bacon (1970: 89-96) identified.

• Idols of the tribe:These idols are common to the human species as such, and emanate from the typical human weakness: our urge to see what we like to see in the world, our search for regularity, and our obsession with our own beliefs. Human minds, Bacon (1970: 92) argued, are like „uneven mirrors‟ that distort the reality. Superstitions and prejudices continue to prevail because of these idols. In fact, the human being‟s „feelings imbue and corrupt his understanding in innumerable and sometimes imperceptible ways‟. • Idols of the den:These idols, unlike the idols of the tribe, are unique to specific individuals. Each individual has

his/her own dispositions and idols. Some, for instance, are inherently optimistic, some are pessimistic, and some strive for antiquity; some love change and innovation. All these individual peculiarities tend to affect one"s ways of seeing, and hence distort the reality.

- Idols of the market: These idols are those that emanate out of human interaction, and cause severe linguistic confusion. Our language often proves to be inadequate to describe the reality as it. No wonder, Bacon (1970: 94) said that „the great and solemn disputes of learned men often terminate in controversies about words and names".

- Idols of the theatre: These are those idols that have crept into men"s minds from the various dogmas of peculiar systems of philosophy' (Bacon 1970: 90). For Bacon, these idols are essentially obstacles and must be overcome. Only then is it possible to see and observe the world without bias. In other words, nature exists out there, and it is only pure empiricism (not contaminated by our feelings and sentiments) that can grasp it. And this objective knowledge, he believed, would enable human beings to establish their superiority over nature. It is in this sense that knowledge is indeed power. And the relationship between the knower and the known is detached and impersonal; the vulnerability of the self of the knower is controlled, and the act of knowing becomes a dispassionate exercise.

If Francis Bacon provided the foundations of empiricism or what is known as the method of induction, Rene Descartes taught us the fundamental lessons of rationalism (or deductive reasoning). Descartes privileged the mental and intellectual, and argued that it was through clear ideas or pure rationality, that human beings could arrive at truth and became free from all uncertainties and errors. For him, the sense could not bereliable source of knowledge; the senses could deceive one. As a result, in an act of meditation, Descartes (1641: 439-440) began to doubt everything that he learned through the senses. I will assume therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning who has

employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams, which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. Yet there was one thing Descartes felt certain about. Even if a demon deceived him, the fact that he was being deceived confirmed his existence as a thinking being. Descartes (1641: 440) wrote, I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no mind, and no body. Does it follow that I too did not exist? Not if Iconvinced myself of something, then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, even if he is deceiving me; and let him, deceive as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition I am, 1 exist, is certainly true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind. In other words, as Descartes argued, 'man is a thing that thinks‟. This led him to privilege the indivisible mind that makes one think, and separate it from the nonthinking body. While one cannot separate oneself from one‟s mind, one can, however, exist without one‟s body! Descartes (1641: 467) said, There is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible. For when I consider the mind or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself. I understand myself to be quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is out off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. For Descartes, this mind/body dualism is absolutely important. The message he conveyed was clear. What provides solid foundations is a distinctively clear/rational thought emanating from the indivisible, integrated, coherent mind. And 8 this rational thought is pure, abstract, disembodied, completely dissociated from the senses, from pain and pleasure, from feelings and emotions. Needless to add, these two fundamentals, namely,

objective empiricism and disembodied rationality, gave a momentum to modern science. But then, it was the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, a logical culmination of European Renaissance, Reformation and Industrial Revolution. This was really a turning point, a breakthrough that generated a new way of seeing, and celebrated the science of Bacon,Descartes and Newton as the most cherished and legitimate body of knowledge.

The Enlightenment *The Enlightenment refers to an intellectual movement, primarily in France and Britain, that spans approximately one hundred years from the 1680s to 1789. Preceding and setting the stage for the Enlightenment were writers and scientists who investigated the natural world and systems of thought, writers such as Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Francis Bacon, and Rene Descartes. Enlightenment writers include Hobbes, Locke, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. The French writers were sometimes called the philosophers. The leading representatives were religious skeptics, political reformers, cultural critics, historians and social theorists (Zeitlin 1990:1).*

In contrast to systems of thought where the sacred had dominated and where questioning 9 was discouraged, Enlightenment thinkers viewed human reason as dominant. No subjects of study were to be forbidden, there were no unaskable questions, with all aspects of human life appropriate for examination and study. In doing this, Enlightenment thinkers combined the philosophic tradition of abstract rational thought of Descartes and other philosophers with the tradition of experimentation or empirical philosophy from Galilei, Newton, Bacon and others. The result was a new system of human inquiry that attacked the old order and privileges, put emphasis and faith on science, the scientific method and education, and acquired the practical function of asking critical questions about existing institutions and demanding that the unreasonable ones, those contrary to human nature, be changed. All social obstacles to human perfectibility were to be progressively eliminated. (Zeitlin1990: 2). The writings of the Enlightenment profoundly affected politics and

the development of sociology. The French Revolution (1789) and the American Revolution (1776) had many causes but many Enlightenment ideas and ways of thinking had a great effect on these political and social changes. The slogans of "liberty, equality, fraternity" and "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" state-the political ideals of these revolutions and reflect the ideas of Enlightenment thought. Possibly it is hard to speak of a singular/unifying Enlightenment agenda, because the philosophers, such as Voltaire (1694-1778), Montesquieu(1689-1755), Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804) and Adam Smith (1723-1790), did not necessarily speak the same language. Nevertheless, from these Enlightenment philosophers it is not altogether 10 impossible to identify a series of the following salient features of the new thinking.

• Instead of a God ordained society, Enlightenment spoke of the primacy of reason. It fought a great battle against Christianity,particularly its implicit notion of originals and imperfectability. Voltaire asserted that human beings were neither good nor evil as such; instead, the specificity of circumstances would matter a great deal in unfolding the potential of human beings (as mentioned in Mary 1996). In other words, it is possible for human beings to shape their destiny and create a better world. In that sense, the Enlightenment agenda was future-oriented and optimistic.

• Its optimism was sustained by its epistemology: its spirit of critical enquiry. „Our age‟, wrote Immanuel Kant (1783), „is in a special degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit‟. Nothing was therefore taken for granted. This criticality gave a new momentum,enabled humankind to come out of the trap of closed/dogmatic thinking, and finally revealed a positive relationship between reason and freedom, science and truth.

• This criticality was not necessarily negative in nature. As a matter of fact, it destroyed as well as constructed. It did not oppose the ethical/spiritual core of Christianity. It opposed only the closed/dogmatic character of Christianity and provided the foundations of a new world based on a secular/liberal worldview. In other words, the roots of

modernity: a project that celebrates scientificity, rationality and individuality could be found in the Enlightenment agenda itself: It was progressive. It believed in a linear/historical progress, which gave a new dynamism to the exploration of knowledge, innovation and experimentation.

- As far as the knowledge of human society was concerned, the philosophy of the Enlightenment gave a new direction, outlined as follows.

i) Society exists out there readily amenable to empirical observation.

ii) This knowledge of society can be objective and universal, and hence cumulative and progressive.

iii) This knowledge is different from and superior to ideological distortions and religious beliefs.

iv) This knowledge is positively useful for the restructuring of human society. Let us now discuss in more detail the interface between science, modernity and sociology.

Biological determinism

Most people ordinarily seem to think that sex and gender are coextensive: women are human females, men are human males. Many feminists have historically disagreed and have endorsed the sex/ gender distinction. Provisionally: ‘sex’ denotes human females and males depending on biological features (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features); ‘gender’ denotes women and men depending on social factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity). The main feminist motivation for making this distinction was to counter biological determinism or the view that biology is destiny.

A typical example of a biological determinist view is that of Geddes and Thompson who, in 1889, argued that social, psychological and behavioural traits were caused by metabolic state. Women supposedly conserve energy (being ‘anabolic’) and this makes them passive,

conservative, sluggish, stable and uninterested in politics. Men expend their surplus energy (being 'katabolic') and this makes them eager, energetic, passionate, variable and, thereby, interested in political and social matters. These biological 'facts' about metabolic states were used not only to explain behavioural differences between women and men but also to justify what our social and political arrangements ought to be. More specifically, they were used to argue for withholding from women political rights accorded to men because (according to Geddes and Thompson) "what was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament" (quoted from Moi 1999, 18). It would be inappropriate to grant women political rights, as they are simply not suited to have those rights; it would also be futile since women (due to their biology) would simply not be interested in exercising their political rights. To counter this kind of biological determinism, feminists have argued that behavioural and psychological differences have social, rather than biological, causes. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir famously claimed that one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, and that "social discrimination produces in women moral and intellectual effects so profound that they appear to be caused by nature" (Beauvoir 1972 [original 1949], 18; for more, see the entry on Simone de Beauvoir). Commonly observed behavioural traits associated with women and men, then, are not caused by anatomy or chromosomes. Rather, they are culturally learned or acquired.

Although biological determinism of the kind endorsed by Geddes and Thompson is nowadays uncommon, the idea that behavioural and psychological differences between women and men have biological causes has not disappeared. In the 1970s, sex differences were used to argue that women should not become airline pilots since they will be hormonally unstable once a month and, therefore, unable to perform their duties as well as men (Rogers 1999, 11). More recently, differences in male and female brains have been said to explain behavioural differences; in particular, the anatomy of corpus callosum, a bundle of nerves that connects the right and left cerebral hemispheres, is thought to be responsible for various psychological and behavioural differences. For

instance, in 1992, a Time magazine article surveyed then prominent biological explanations of differences between women and men claiming that women's thicker corpus callosums could explain what 'women's intuition' is based on and impair women's ability to perform some specialised visual-spatial skills, like reading maps (Gorman 1992). Anne Fausto-Sterling has questioned the idea that differences in corpus callosums cause behavioural and psychological differences. First, the corpus callosum is a highly variable piece of anatomy; as a result, generalisations about its size, shape and thickness that hold for women and men in general should be viewed with caution. Second, differences in adult human corpus callosums are not found in infants; this may suggest that physical brain differences actually develop as responses to differential treatment. Third, given that visual-spatial skills (like map reading) can be improved by practice, even if women and men's corpus callosums differ, this does not make the resulting behavioural differences immutable. (Fausto-Sterling 2000b, chapter 5).

1.2 Gender terminology

In order to distinguish biological differences from social/psychological ones and to talk about the latter, feminists appropriated the term 'gender'. Psychologists writing on transsexuality were the first to employ gender terminology in this sense. Until the 1960s, 'gender' was often used to refer to masculine and feminine words, like le and la in French. However, in order to explain why some people felt that they were 'trapped in the wrong bodies', the psychologist Robert Stoller (1968) began using the terms 'sex' to pick out biological traits and 'gender' to pick out the amount of femininity and masculinity a person exhibited. Although (by and large) a person's sex and gender complemented each other, separating out these terms seemed to make theoretical sense allowing Stoller to explain the phenomenon of transsexuality: transsexuals' sex and gender simply don't match.

Along with psychologists like Stoller, feminists found it useful to distinguish sex and gender. This enabled them to argue that many differences between women and men were socially produced and,

therefore, changeable. Gayle Rubin (for instance) uses the phrase 'sex/gender system' in order to describe "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention" (1975, 165). Rubin employed this system to articulate that "part of social life which is the locus of the oppression of women" (1975, 159) describing gender as the "socially imposed division of the sexes" (1975, 179). Rubin's thought was that although biological differences are fixed, gender differences are the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave. Women are oppressed as women and "by having to be women" (Rubin 1975, 204). However, since gender is social, it is thought to be mutable and alterable by political and social reform that would ultimately bring an end to women's subordination. Feminism should aim to create a "genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love" (Rubin 1975, 204).

In some earlier interpretations, like Rubin's, sex and gender were thought to complement one another. The slogan 'Gender is the social interpretation of sex' captures this view. Nicholson calls this 'the coat-rack view' of gender: our sexed bodies are like coat racks and "provide the site upon which gender [is] constructed" (1994, 81). Gender conceived of as masculinity and femininity is superimposed upon the 'coat-rack' of sex as each society imposes on sexed bodies their cultural conceptions of how males and females should behave. This socially constructs gender differences – or the amount of femininity/masculinity of a person – upon our sexed bodies. That is, according to this interpretation, all humans are either male or female; their sex is fixed. But cultures interpret sexed bodies differently and project different norms on those bodies thereby creating feminine and masculine persons. Distinguishing sex and gender, however, also enables the two to come apart: they are separable in that one can be sexed male and yet be gendered a woman, or vice versa (Haslanger 2000b; Stoljar 1995).

So, this group of feminist arguments against biological determinism suggested that gender differences result from cultural practices and social expectations. Nowadays it is more common to denote this by saying that gender is socially constructed. This means that genders (women and men) and gendered traits (like being nurturing or ambitious) are the "intended or unintended product[s] of a social practice" (Haslanger 1995, 97). But which social practices construct gender, what social construction is and what being of a certain gender amounts to are major feminist controversies. There is no consensus on these issues. (See the entry on intersections between analytic and continental feminism for more on different ways to understand gender.)

Gender socialisation

One way to interpret Beauvoir's claim that one is not born but rather becomes a woman is to take it as a claim about gender socialisation: females become women through a process whereby they acquire feminine traits and learn feminine behaviour. Masculinity and femininity are thought to be products of nurture or how individuals are brought up. They are causally constructed (Haslanger 1995, 98): social forces either have a causal role in bringing gendered individuals into existence or (to some substantial sense) shape the way we are qua women and men. And the mechanism of construction is social learning. For instance, Kate Millett takes gender differences to have "essentially cultural, rather than biological bases" that result from differential treatment (1971, 28–9). For her, gender is "the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (Millett 1971, 31). Feminine and masculine gender-norms, however, are problematic in that gendered behaviour conveniently fits with and reinforces women's subordination so that women are socialised into subordinate social roles: they learn to be passive, ignorant, docile, emotional helpmeets for men (Millett 1971, 26). However, since these roles are simply learned, we can create more equal societies by 'unlearning' social roles. That is, feminists should aim to diminish the influence of socialisation.

Social learning theorists hold that a huge array of different influences socialise us as women and men. This being the case, it is extremely difficult to counter gender socialisation. For instance, parents often unconsciously treat their female and male children differently. When parents have been asked to describe their 24-hour old infants, they have done so using gender-stereotypic language: boys are describes as strong, alert and coordinated and girls as tiny, soft and delicate. Parents' treatment of their infants further reflects these descriptions whether they are aware of this or not (Renzetti & Curran 1992, 32). Some socialisation is more overt: children are often dressed in gender stereotypical clothes and colours (boys are dressed in blue, girls in pink) and parents tend to buy their children gender stereotypical toys. They also (intentionally or not) tend to reinforce certain 'appropriate' behaviours. While the precise form of gender socialization has changed since the onset of second-wave feminism, even today girls are discouraged from playing sports like football or from playing 'rough and tumble' games and are more likely than boys to be given dolls or cooking toys to play with; boys are told not to 'cry like a baby' and are more likely to be given masculine toys like trucks and guns (for more, see Kimmel 2000, 122–126).[1]

According to social learning theorists, children are also influenced by what they observe in the world around them. This, again, makes countering gender socialisation difficult. For one, children's books have portrayed males and females in blatantly stereotypical ways: for instance, males as adventurers and leaders, and females as helpers and followers. One way to address gender stereotyping in children's books has been to portray females in independent roles and males as non-aggressive and nurturing (Renzetti & Curran 1992, 35). Some publishers have attempted an alternative approach by making their characters, for instance, gender-neutral animals or genderless imaginary creatures (like TV's Teletubbies). However, parents reading books with gender-neutral or genderless characters often undermine the publishers' efforts by reading them to their children in ways that depict the characters as either feminine or masculine. According to Renzetti and Curran, parents labelled the overwhelming majority of gender-neutral characters

masculine whereas those characters that fit feminine gender stereotypes (for instance, by being helpful and caring) were labelled feminine (1992, 35). Socialising influences like these are still thought to send implicit messages regarding how females and males should act and are expected to act shaping us into feminine and masculine persons.

Gender as feminine and masculine personality

Nancy Chodorow (1978; 1995) has criticised social learning theory as too simplistic to explain gender differences (see also Deaux & Major 1990; Gatens 1996). Instead, she holds that gender is a matter of having feminine and masculine personalities that develop in early infancy as responses to prevalent parenting practices. In particular, gendered personalities develop because women tend to be the primary caretakers of small children. Chodorow holds that because mothers (or other prominent females) tend to care for infants, infant male and female psychic development differs. Crudely put: the mother-daughter relationship differs from the mother-son relationship because mothers are more likely to identify with their daughters than their sons. This unconsciously prompts the mother to encourage her son to psychologically individuate himself from her thereby prompting him to develop well defined and rigid ego boundaries. However, the mother unconsciously discourages the daughter from individuating herself thereby prompting the daughter to develop flexible and blurry ego boundaries. Childhood gender socialisation further builds on and reinforces these unconsciously developed ego boundaries finally producing feminine and masculine persons (1995, 202–206). This perspective has its roots in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, although Chodorow's approach differs in many ways from Freud's.

Gendered personalities are supposedly manifested in common gender stereotypical behaviour. Take emotional dependency. Women are stereotypically more emotional and emotionally dependent upon others around them, supposedly finding it difficult to distinguish their own interests and wellbeing from the interests and wellbeing of their children and partners. This is said to be because of their blurry and (somewhat)

confused ego boundaries: women find it hard to distinguish their own needs from the needs of those around them because they cannot sufficiently individuate themselves from those close to them. By contrast, men are stereotypically emotionally detached, preferring a career where dispassionate and distanced thinking are virtues. These traits are said to result from men's well-defined ego boundaries that enable them to prioritise their own needs and interests sometimes at the expense of others' needs and interests.

Chodorow thinks that these gender differences should and can be changed. Feminine and masculine personalities play a crucial role in women's oppression since they make females overly attentive to the needs of others and males emotionally deficient. In order to correct the situation, both male and female parents should be equally involved in parenting (Chodorow 1995, 214). This would help in ensuring that children develop sufficiently individuated senses of selves without becoming overly detached, which in turn helps to eradicate common gender stereotypical behaviours.

Gender as feminine and masculine sexuality

Catharine MacKinnon develops her theory of gender as a theory of sexuality. Very roughly: the social meaning of sex (gender) is created by sexual objectification of women whereby women are viewed and treated as objects for satisfying men's desires (MacKinnon 1989). Masculinity is defined as sexual dominance, femininity as sexual submissiveness: genders are “created through the eroticization of dominance and submission. The man/woman difference and the dominance/submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex” (MacKinnon 1989, 113). For MacKinnon, gender is constitutively constructed: in defining genders (or masculinity and femininity) we must make reference to social factors (see Haslanger 1995, 98). In particular, we must make reference to the position one occupies in the sexualised dominance/submission dynamic: men occupy the sexually dominant position, women the sexually submissive one. As a result, genders are by definition hierarchical and this hierarchy is fundamentally tied to

sexualised power relations. The notion of ‘gender equality’, then, does not make sense to MacKinnon. If sexuality ceased to be a manifestation of dominance, hierarchical genders (that are defined in terms of sexuality) would cease to exist.

So, gender difference for MacKinnon is not a matter of having a particular psychological orientation or behavioural pattern; rather, it is a function of sexuality that is hierarchal in patriarchal societies. This is not to say that men are naturally disposed to sexually objectify women or that women are naturally submissive. Instead, male and female sexualities are socially conditioned: men have been conditioned to find women's subordination sexy and women have been conditioned to find a particular male version of female sexuality as erotic – one in which it is erotic to be sexually submissive. For MacKinnon, both female and male sexual desires are defined from a male point of view that is conditioned by pornography (MacKinnon 1989, chapter 7). Bluntly put: pornography portrays a false picture of ‘what women want’ suggesting that women in actual fact are and want to be submissive. This conditions men's sexuality so that they view women's submission as sexy. And male dominance enforces this male version of sexuality onto women, sometimes by force. MacKinnon's thought is not that male dominance is a result of social learning (see 2.1.); rather, socialization is an expression of power. That is, socialized differences in masculine and feminine traits, behaviour, and roles are not responsible for power inequalities. Females and males (roughly put) are socialised differently because there are underlying power inequalities. As MacKinnon puts it, ‘dominance’ (power relations) is prior to ‘difference’ (traits, behaviour and roles) (see, MacKinnon 2006). MacKinnon, then, sees legal restrictions on pornography as paramount to ending women's subordinate status that stems from their gender.

11.3 SCIENCE, MODERNITY AND SOCIOLOGY

It would not be wrong to say that the modern social sciences emerged out of this epistemological optimism. It was, therefore, not surprising that

right from its inception modern sociology, to take a specific example,was guided by these two philosophic foundations: a) objective/universal science, and b) progressive and historically inevitable modernity. Sociology saw itself as a science: a scientific study of society. As an objective, value neutral and empirical science, it differentiated itself from religion, metaphysics and commonsense. As you have been learning about positivism and even classical sociology and the way both grew in the late nineteenth-and-early twentiethcentury, you would discover the immense impact of Enlightenment philosophers on sociology and 12 its methodology. Likewise, sociology emerged in order to make sense of the new age. Sociology, it is often said, was a product of Enlightenment modernity (Nisbet 1967).Not solely that. The leading sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, from Auguste Comte to Karl Marx, were the children of modernity. In their own specific ways, they celebrated the new age and wrote substantially about it. We would take some examples to make this point clear.

Examples of Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx *Emile DurkheimFirst, recall Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who wrote The Rules of Sociological Method (1895, English Translation published in 1938/1964). He believed in the scientific study of society, and wanted sociology to project itself as a science of social facts, not a political/partisan ideology. And one of his major writings,The Division of Labour (1893, English translation published in 1964), was an attempt to conceptualize the formation of modern industrial societies characterized by heightened differentiation, specialization and a complex form of division of labour. He made a distinction between such a modern society with its „organic solidarity" and a simple and/or traditional society having „mechanical solidarity. Karl Marx Second, think of Karl Marx (1818-1883), who believed in the Enlightenment affirmation 13 of scientific reasoning. He seemed to be heavily influenced by Newton (1642-1727) and Darwin (1809-1882). And it is now well known that he sought to dedicate the second volume of Capital (1867) to Charles Darwin. Marx"s „scientificity" could be seen in his urge to discover the „iron laws" of capitalist development, his inclination to plead for*

universal generalizations like „the history of hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle" and the distinction he made between historical materialism and ideology. Ideology, he argued almost like Francis Bacon, distorts and falsifies the reality, whereas the science of historical materialism enables us to see the reality as it is: how the mode of production seeks to govern the socio-cultural life and resultant conflicts and contradictions in society. Marx"s affinity with modernity could be seen in his faith in historical progress, in science, in urbanity. No wonder, he didn"t appreciate the „Asiatic mode of production" or „oriental despotism", and saw immense possibilities in the British rule in India because it enabled us to overcome our isolation and stagnation, and experience the light of modern civilization!

It is not our contention to argue that these thinkers were blind champions of modernity. They were great scholars, and immensely sensitive. They could see the pathologies of modernity. You may already know that Durkheim was concerned about anomies: the growing normlessness in modernsocieties. You also know that Marx was a great humanist who critiqued the fragmented character of capitalism, and its alienation. And you are also aware that Max Weber, yet another great sociologist of the classical era, spoke of the pathos of disenchantment inherent in the modern age. But you need to appreciate the essential point. Even when they saw problems with modernity, they did not want to regress to a non-modern age. Instead, they retained their faith in the foundations of modernity and science, and sought to accomplish the agenda of modernity by making it more humane and egalitarian. As you can see, science with its central principles of objectivity, universalization and causal explanation did have a tremendous impact on the formation of modern social science. This, however, does not mean that there was absolute agreement on the „unity of method". True, positivism, a dominant mode of sociological enquiry in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, did not see much qualitative difference in the study of nature and socio-cultural domain. But then, there were many who differed, and pleaded for a separate mode of enquiry in social and cultural sciences. Its roots could be seen in Immanuel Kant (1724-1804),

one of the leading Enlightenment philosophers. While meditating on nature, he spoke of two distinct principles:a) the physical component being enslaved by the senses, and b) the moral component that strives for truth, justice and beauty (Seidman 1983). No wonder, one aspect of the Enlightenment social theory that spoke of human beings „conditioning gave birth to material/structural analysis, and the other mode of enquiry that spoke of human beings‟ freedom gave importance to voluntarism, human agency, creativity and reflexivity. Herein lies the point of departure. There are social scientists who would argue that unlike an object in the physico-chemical or biological world, the human being is a creative/reflexive creature, and human society is, therefore, a domain of meanings, not just an „external thing‟ constraining us. In other words, human society, it is 15 argued, has to be seen as a product of creative accomplishment on the part of the social actors. The task of social science is to understand and interpret these meanings. Max Weber, as you will learn in, emerged, out of this philosophic tradition. For Weber (1949), sociology is an interpretative study of the subjective meaning complex of social actions. He regarded it as verstehen, a method of understanding theconscious/subjective meanings social actors attach the world. It was in this sense that Weber saw beyond mere economism, and interpreted early capitalismas a domain of meanings that the proponents of Protestantism or Calvinism attached to the world. Well, Weber did speak of the human agency. But this does not mean that his sociology was “subjective” in nature. Instead, he sought to unite the interpretative study of subjective meanings with an objective causal analysis. He was not against the basic tenets of science: objectivity, value neutrality and causal explanation. What he was objecting to was the positivist urge to equate society with nature, and undermine the domain of meanings. He was therefore talking about „ideal types‟, which were more like models rather than exact scientific laws. In the twentieth century thetradition of interpretative sociology was further developed through phenomenological and ethno methodological traditions (Giddens 1976). The central thrust of these traditions is that the world is largely a world experienced by human beings, and the task of social science is to describe, understand and make sense of this world: how people

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themselves define and 16 construct it. Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), a major proponent of the phenomenological tradition, spoke of the inter-subjective world in which people interact, communicate and understand one another through the process of typification@: a process that enables people to fix and define one another, and have a shared role-expectation. It is through this process of typification, that a meaningful and stable social order is possible. For Schutz (1972) the everyday world in which people interact is the paramount reality. It is taken for granted. And that makes society possible. But then, there are other realms, like the realm of dreams, or the realm of scientific theorizing, in which people experience the world. All these finite provinces of meaning have their own notions of time and space, and shifts from one realm to the other involve „shock‟. But then, for Schutz (1972), the paramount reality is most important, and all of us have to come back to it and experience the world as direct/real actors. Sociology, for Schutz (1972), must describe and understand how people experience the world. This means that sociology must take peoples descriptions and definitions seriously. It is in this sense that sociological constructs are „second order constructs‟. Likewise, Harold Garfinkel (1967) spoke of ethno-methodology, or „people's methodology‟. The task is to describe how people themselves define their world, not to explain it in terms of some context-free, abstract, universal generalization. In other words, in these traditions you are witnessing a shift from abstract explanation to meaningful understanding, from universality to specificity, from theory to description, from structural causes to people's lived experiences.

Let us complete Reflection and Action 6.1 to fully grasp the notion of construction of meaning.

But then, as you would learn, these very foundations are in a crisis, since all these modern principles, scientific objectivity, historical progress,coherent/rational self, and the agency/ freedom of the actor, are doubted, particularly with the advent of post modernity. And it has caused a severe philosophic crisis, and sociology has to cope with it.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Foundations of Science.

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2. Discuss the Science, Modernity and Sociology.

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11.4 RETHINKING SCIENCE

Before you learn more about the challenges that post-modernists have posed to the discipline, it is important to devote some attention to the philosophy of science (see Unit 1). Science, as you have already learnt, provided the foundations of modern social science. But then the very notion of science has undergone dramatic changes in our times, and the philosophers of science have made us rethink science. No wonder, this intense debate on the nature of science did have its impact on the philosophy of social science. It is, therefore, important that you learn something meaningful about this debate. 19 Let us begin with Karl Popper (1902-1994), a leading philosopher of science in the twentieth century, who changed our understanding of science and society. Popper grew up in Vienna, taught in New Zealand and England, encountered logical positivism and Marxism, and came forward with his distinctive idea of science (Popper, 1972). He was heavily influenced by the changes in physics that emerged out of Einstein" stheory of relativity; it revealed that Newtonian physics, which was dominant formore than two

hundred years, could be interrogated. This led him to plead for therelative character of science. Science is not something solid and stable, or eternally valid. Instead, science, for him, is a set of conjectures subject to falsification and refutation. No wonder, as Popper (1972: 37) asserted, the creation of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability or testability. A theory which is not refutable by any conceivable event, he reminded us, is non-scientific. Contrary to popular belief, irrefutability is not a virtue of science. The challenge confronting the scientific community is not to search for confirmations/ verifications of the existing theory, but to search for falsification and refutation. It is not at all necessary to absolutize or sanctify any particular source of knowledge, be it Baconian empiricism or Cartesian rationality, and think that the knowledge gained through it is a domain of absolute certainty. This would lead to dogmatic thinking and generate a false belief that the world is full of verifications of the existing theory. Popper, however, critiqued this dogmatic thinking, and argued that science could progress only through an open culture promoting the spirit of refutability and falsifiability.

Read the following quotation from Popper (1972: 27). 20 So my answer to the questions how do you know? What is the source or the basis of your assertion? What observations have led you to it? Would be: I do not know: my assertion was merely a guess. Never mind the source, or the sources, from which it may spring, there are many possible sources and I may not be aware of half of them; and origins or pedigrees have in any case little bearing upon truth. But if you are interested in the problem which I tried to solve by my tentative assertion, you may help me by criticizing it as severely as you can, and if you can design some experimental test which you think might refute my assertion, I shall gladly, and to the best of my power, help you to refute it. It is only through this culture of "critical rationalism" that science progresses. Science is inherently critical and democratic, perpetually progressing through trial and error, conjectures and refutations. But pseudo-science is dogmatic; it is too certain of its explanatory power, it sees only confirmations and verifications. With this understanding of science

Popper critiqued logical positivism, determinism and Marxism. For instance, Marxism, Popper alleged, is not genuinely interested in falsifiability. Instead, it is dogmatic, desperately striving for confirmations and verifications. Popper (1972: 35) said: A Marxist could not open a newspaper without finding on every page confirming evidence of his interpretation of history; not only in news, but also in its presentation, which revealed the class bias of the paper-----and especially of course in what the paper did not say.

Moreover, Marxism as a doctrine of historicism, as Popper (1972: 337) argued, is inclined to large-scale historical prophesies. But then, „the kind of prophecies which Marxism offers are in their logical character more akin to those of the Old Testament than to those of modern physics‟. This sort of prophecy is possible only in a domain that is well isolated, stationary and recurrent, say the solar system. But unlike the solar system, human society cannot be separated from our deeds. Society, far from being repetitive, is perpetually changing, evolving and growing, „The fact that we can predict eclipses does not, therefore, provide a valid reason for explicating that we can predict revolutions‟ (Popper 1970: 340). In other words, Karl Popper gave a new meaning to science. He sought to free science from positivistic certainties. Science, for him, is relative; science is like myth-making. And what promotes science is not the arrogance emanating from cognitive certainty, but a spirit of humbleness that encourages the possibility of falsifiability and refutability. Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) was yet another major philosopher of science who taught us about normal science and it inherent conservatism, and extraordinary science leading to scientific revolutions. For Kuhn, normal science relies on the centrality of the paradigm that a particular scientific community takes for granted.

To use Kuhn‟s (1970: 10) own words, „paradigms are some accepted examples of actual scientific practice, examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together, that provide models from which arise particular coherent traditions of scientific research‟. A paradigm, in other words, provides the 22 background, anddirects the

trajectory of normal science. Its power lies in its ability to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. It was in this sense that Newton‟s Principaand Optics,Franklin‟s Electricityand Einstein‟s Theory of Relativityacted as paradigms at different junctures of scientific history.

For Kuhn, normal science does not seek to refute, falsify or interrogate the prevalent paradigm. Instead, it seeks to actualize the potential of the paradigm itself, and resolve all residual ambiguities through further elaboration, experimentation and fact-gathering activities. Kuhn (1970: 23-24) said, Normal science consists in the actualization of that promise, an actualization achieved by extending the knowledge of those facts that the paradigm displaysas particularly revealing, by increasing the extent of the match between thosefacts and the paradigm‟s predictions, and by further articulation of the paradigmitself. Kuhn characterized this entire process as a „puzzle solving‟ activity. The reason is that the problems normal science investigates are more like puzzles that can be solved only through the rules provided by the paradigmitself. Whatever does not fit into the paradigm is kept aside. Kuhn (1970: 37) elaborated:

A paradigm can insulate the community from those socially important problemsthat are not reducible to the puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies. One ofthe reasons why normal science seeks to progress so rapidly 23 is that its practitionersconcentrate on problems that only their own lack of ingenuity should keep them from solving. No wonder, the centrality of the paradigm, the commitment to it, and its specificity give a concrete direction to science. It becomes a profession with its specific adherents and specialists, with its journals and publications. And, paradoxically, it is this conservatism that leads to the cumulative progress of normal science. But then, there are situations when the crisis/ anomaly begins to confront the scientific community. It may arise because of the persistent failure of normal science to make sense of the new phenomenon. This crisis situation leads to extraordinary science. It is extraordinary because, unlike normal science, it acknowledges the

crisis, interrogates the established paradigm, and dares to become innovative.

Kuhn (1970: 90-91) held, Confronted with anomaly or with crisis, scientists take a different attitude towardexisting paradigms, and the nature of their research changes accordingly. Theproliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything, theexpression of explicit discontent, the recourse to philosophy and to debateover fundamentals, all these are symptoms of a transition from normal to extraordinary research. And eventually, it is this extraordinary science that leads to a „paradigm shift" resulting in scientific revolutions. It was the way Einstein, to take a specific example, made a revolution in physics. The revolutionary or new paradigm is incompatible with the earlier one. Indeed, Kuhn repeatedly emphasized on the „incommensurability of paradigms". There are substantial differences between successive paradigms. For instance, in one solutions are compounds, in the other mixtures. One is embedded in a flat, the other in a curved matrix of space. The result is that the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. It is not easy for the scientific community, as Kuhn reminded us, to accept the new paradigm, because massive conservatism/ dogmatism characterize the community of normal scientists. It is, however, important to realize that, despite this resistance, the new paradigm succeeds in attracting more and more adherents, and eventually establishes its hegemony. The new paradigm appeals because it is said to be „neater", „more suitable', or „simpler" than the old. What are the implications of this understanding of science for us? Normal science, because of the centrality of the paradigm, is extremely focused. It is also narrow and conservative because it does not wish to see beyond the paradigm. Things are, however, different in other creative fieldslike music, graphic arts and literature, and even the social sciences, the field that, unlike natural science, cannot be said to have a hegemonic paradigm to follow. No wonder, in these fields learners are made aware of competing and often incommensurable approaches, and they must ultimately choose for themselves. An example would make this

difference clear. Students of physics working on optics would feel so confident about the dominant paradigm that they would find no reason to entertain any other competing theory.

That is precisely what the success of a paradigm is all about; its ability to defeat all competing approaches. But imagine students of sociology working 25 on religion. For them, there is no hegemonic paradigm. Instead, they are likely to be aware of multiple, competing and even incommensurable approaches to religion, say, the Durkheimian, Weberian and Marxist approaches. This makes social science more „open ended‟ and fluid. Paul Feyerabend (1924-1994) was another leading thinker who critiquedthe hegemony of scientific method. No method, even the most successful one, for Feyerabend (1982), has the right to subdue and marginalize other methods. No wonder, he refused to give his consent to scientism, that is, the belief that science is the only valid form of knowledge. Instead, he revealed the politics of science, its relationship with power, and the way through propaganda and other strategies it murdered all alternative forms of knowledge. Scientism, he insisted, would go against the true spirit of ademocratic society, because democracy should imply the plurality of knowledge systems, methods and traditions of enquiry. Each tradition, each fairy tale, each story, for Feyerabend (1982), has its validity. Nothing is dead or meaningless. It is important that we embrace an „anarchist theory of knowledge‟ implying that everything is possible. You may be wondering why we are discussing so much the philosophy of science. If you think deeply, you would realize that it is meaningful for social science. There are two lessons that you can learn. i) Positivism that seeks to legitimize the 'certainty' of science gets eroded. For Popper, science is like a conjecture subject to refutation; for Kuhn, science is conservative, and prevails because scientists too, like any other group of people, are being guided by peer group pressure and other socializing forces; and for Feyerabend, science has its own 26 history of domination and violence. In other words, it speeds the process of delegitimization of the positivistic foundation of social science. ii) With the demystification of science, sociology tends to become more sensitive to the plurality of methods and

traditions. It acquires the courage to come out of the shadow of natural science.

11.5 CRISIS IN FOUNDATION

It is, however, the advent of post-modernity that has caused a severe crisis to the philosophic foundation of the social sciences. As you already know, social science or sociology was a product of Enlightenment modernity. Its foundations lay in its adherence 28 to scientific objectivity, its belief in reason and progress and its acceptance of the supremacy of western modernity. Post-modernity deconstructs all these foundations, and asserts that there is no universal truth, there is no culture that can claim itself to be superior to others, and the world is a site of differences. In other words, for postmodernists, there is no grand truth on science, progress and modernity. Instead, there are multiple voices, and the very notion of a rational/ coherent subject is questioned (Harvey 1989). There are many reasons for the disillusionment with the project of modernity. The experience of war, violence and totalitarianism in the twentieth century, the growing assertion of the colonized people, and the resultant decline in the legitimacy of western power, the arousal of subaltern voices, the proliferation of new technologies of communication, and the rising consumer culture making a distinction between „high" and „low" meaningless----all these factors, as you would learn, led many sensitive thinkers in the West to rethink and interrogate the very foundations of modernity. The question is: what are its implications for sociology?

Implications of Post-modernism for Sociology Sociology, from Comte to Marx, was heavily influenced by science. Its objectivity, its universality and explanatory power. Hence sociology was seen as different from ideology/ narrative/ fiction/ metaphysics. Sociology as a science of society was thought to be more objective and true, a piece of reliable knowledge. But then, for post- 29 modernists, science has lost its sole claim to truth; science itself is being seen as yet another narrative, a story, and an ideology. And, therefore, science cannot be seen as the master narrative. There is no master truth, no totalizing theory. Instead,

in this world of multimodality there are diverse stories and truths. It is a world without consensus, without coherence, without a metatheory.

- Hence all these modern sociologies with their totalizing claims, Comte‟s law of three stages, Durkheim's division of labour leading to organic solidarity, Weber‟s modernity as widespread rationalization, and Marx‟s theory of class analysis, lose their significance. And sociology becomes, to use Zygmunt Bauman‟s (1987) words, "merely an act of translation of multiple traditions without any claim for legitimating the grand truth". And as science is being deprived of its validity claim sociologists in the post-modern setting become free to play with innumerable sources: narratives, life histories, fictions, popular cinema and music.

- Post-modernists questioned the sanctity of knowledge as an objective quest for truth. As Michel Foucault would argue, knowledge is never separated from power, and power from knowledge (discussed in Sheridan 1980). For example, psychiatry can be seen as an integral component of a disciplinary society. With its notion of „normalcy‟ it seeks to modulate /control sexuality or madness. It is like formulating a concept like discourse that embodies knowledge as well as power, and has a principle of exclusion and inclusion. Hence we have a discourse on madness or sexuality that allows psychiatrists, doctors and other „normalizing judges‟ to categorize people as „mad‟ or „sexually deviant‟. In other words, everything is constructed, and there is no 30 natural/permanent truth. Furthermore, the idea of an emancipatory modernsociety gets challenged, and we are told about a disciplinary society characterized by a widespread network of surveillance machinery. Yes, post-modernists have caused a severe crisis. For them, there is nofoundational truth (as put forward by Bacon and Descartes) that can prove to be objective, there is no universal/ totalizing theory (like Marxism) that can overcome local contexts and heterogeneity, and there is no "superior" method (like science or positivism). Here is a situation, a typical post-modern condition, leading to relativism, incoherence and schizophrenia. But then, there are social scientists who

do not give their consent to post-modernism, even when they see problems with modernity and science. And this debate goes on. As you progress you will learn more about it and also participate in the debate.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write about the Rethinking Science.
   …………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………
2. Discuss the Crisis in Foundation.
   …………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………
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11.6 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have tried to understand the philosophical bases of the social sciences and how different epistemological and metaphysical issues dealt within philosophy have had a bearing on various perspectives and methodologies of the social sciences. As you can see from the discussion in this Unit, there has been no single paradigm or theory which has dominated the social sciences, including sociology. Though sociology was influenced by natural science and its methodologies, especially in its early stages, in an attempt to establish itself as a discipline, it has realized that the subject matter of sociology, involving as it is human 31 beings, is not amenable to generalizations and laws of the Newtonian kind. With the discovery of increasingly different worldviews and particular cultures, it became difficult for sociologists to come up with universal explanations. Even if they did, the same came under heavy criticism. The increasing need to represent plurality has produced a new wave of critique leading to a post-

modernist's valorization of many methods and in that almost everything is acceptable.

11.7 KEY WORDS

Rethinking: consider or assess (something, especially a course of action) again, especially in order to change it.

Modernity: Modernity, a topic in the humanities and social sciences, is both a historical period, as well as the ensemble of particular socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that arose in the wake of the Renaissance—in the "Age of Reason" of 17th-century thought and the 18th-century "Enlightenment".

Sociology: Sociology is a study of society, patterns of social relationships, social interaction and culture of everyday life. It is a social science that uses various methods of empirical investigation and critical analysis to develop a body of knowledge about social order, acceptance, and change or social evolution.

11.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Discuss the Foundations of Science.
2. Discuss the Science, Modernity and Sociology.
3. Write about the Rethinking Science.
4. Discuss the Crisis in Foundation.

11.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Phillip, Derek L. 1973. Abandoning Method.Jossey-Brass: New York (For a critique the epistemological foundations of common research procedures)
- Coser, Lewis A. 1969.Sociological Theory.Macmillan: London (For a general collection of key passages from classic writings in sociological theory)

11.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 11.2
2. See Section 11.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 11.4
2. See Section 11.5

UNIT 12: POST-COLONIALISM

STRUCTURE

12.0 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 'The Holy Trinity'

12.3 Said on Heart of Darkness

12.4 The Importance of Post colonialism

12.5 Let us sum up

12.6 Key Words

12.7 Questions for Review

12.8 Suggested readings and references

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall give you some idea of the wide field known as Postcolonial Theory; (in some cases 'colonial discourse analysis'; but the former term is more inclusive). Three key notions will be taken up by us. These are: 'Orientalism' (Said), 'Subalternity' (Spivak) and 'Mimicry' (Bhabha). These three major critics are often taken to be the 'Holy Trinity' of postcolonial theory and limiting ourselves to their work (a significant part of it in any event) is enough to give us a sense of some of the main issues thrown up by the field as a whole.

- 'The Holy Trinity'
- Said on Heart of Darkness
- The Importance of Post colonialism

12.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated earlier, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan are three French thinkers (they are mostly clubbed under 'poststructuralism') who have exercised a profound influence on almost all that has happened in literary theory in recent times. In the case of postcolonial theory, the man who has exercised the greatest influence on

the field is Foucault. Said's work shows his influence in a very marked way. Spivak and Bhabha also draw from him. The more obvious influence on Spivak is that of Derrida and in Bhabha's case the more obvious influence is that of Lacan. Since power is a major issue in postcdonial theory let us take a look at Foucault's view of power. Simply stated, 'discourse' (to Foucault) is a system of statements within which and by which the world can be known. Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations that inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them. Power too is a relation and gets exercised within discourses in the ways in which these discourses constitute and govern individual subjects. In The History of Sexuality, Volume One, An Introduction, Foucault defines power as: The multiplicity of force relations imminent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization, as the process by which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the State apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (p.92). Postcolonialism involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its present effects both at the level of ex-colonial societies and of more general global developnlents thought to be the after-effects of empire. What was it that gave rise to postcolonialism? Why was it that a study of the cultural dimension of imperialism became important? First, independence movements around the world put an end to colonialism. Yet the residual effects of imperialism continued to affect the cultures of the erstwhile colonies. Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961) is one such intervention in colonial discourse. By the 1980's a substantial body of commonwealth literature had emerged in which writers tried to make sense of the impact of colonialism. There was a greater awareness of the power relatioils between the West and

Third World cultures. All these led to a study and analysis of colonialism and its after-effects.

The confusion about the meaning of the term imperialism reflects the way that the concept has changed over time. Although the English word imperialism was not commonly used before the nineteenth century, Elizabethans already described the United Kingdom as "the British Empire." As Britain began to acquire overseas dependencies, the concept of empire was employed more frequently. Imperialism was understood as a system of military domination and sovereignty over territories. The day to day work of government might be exercised indirectly through local assemblies or indigenous rulers who paid tribute, but sovereignty rested with the British. The shift away from this traditional understanding of empire was influenced by the Leninist analysis of imperialism as a system oriented towards economic exploitation. According to Lenin, imperialism was the necessary and inevitable result of the logic of accumulation in late capitalism. Thus, for Lenin and subsequent Marxists, imperialism described a historical stage of capitalism rather than a trans-historical practice of political and military domination. The lasting impact of the Marxist approach is apparent in contemporary debates about American imperialism, a term which usually means American economic hegemony, regardless of whether such power is exercised directly or indirectly (Young 2001).

Given the difficulty of consistently distinguishing between the two terms, this entry will use colonialism as a broad concept that refers to the project of European political domination from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries that ended with the national liberation movements of the 1960s. Post-colonialism will be used to describe the political and theoretical struggles of societies that experienced the transition from political dependence to sovereignty. This entry will use imperialism as a broad term that refers to economic, military, political domination that is achieved without significant permanent European settlement.

Marxism and Leninism

In recent years, scholars have devoted less attention to the debates on colonialism within the Marxist tradition. This reflects the waning influence of Marxism in the academy and in political practice. Marxism, however, has influenced both post-colonial theory and anti-colonial independence movements around the world. Marxists have drawn attention to the material basis of European political expansion and developed concepts that help explain the persistence of economic exploitation after the end of direct political rule.

Although Marx never developed a theory of colonialism, his analysis of capitalism emphasized its inherent tendency to expand in search of new markets. In his classic works such as The Communist Manifesto, Grundrisse, and Capital, Marx predicted that the bourgeoisie would continue to create a global market and undermine both local and national barriers to its own expansion. Expansion is a necessary product of the core dynamic of capitalism: overproduction. Competition among producers drives them to cut wages, which in turn leads to a crisis of under-consumption. The only way to prevent economic collapse is to find new markets to absorb excess consumer goods. From a Marxist perspective, some form of imperialism is inevitable. By exporting population to resource rich foreign territories, a nation creates a market for industrial goods and a reliable source of natural resources. Alternately, weaker countries can face the choice of either voluntarily admitting foreign products that will undermine domestic industry or submitting to political domination, which will accomplish the same end.

In a series of newspaper articles published in the 1850s in the New York Daily Tribune, Marx specifically discussed the impact of British colonialism in India. His analysis was consistent with his general theory of political and economic change. He described India as an essentially feudal society experiencing the painful process of modernization. According to Marx, however, Indian "feudalism" was a distinctive form of economic organization. He reached this conclusion because he believed (incorrectly) that agricultural land in India was owned communally. Marx used the concept of "Oriental despotism" to describe

a specific type of class domination that used the state's power of taxation in order to extract resources from the peasantry. According to Marx, oriental despotism emerged in India because agricultural productivity depended on large-scale public works such as irrigation that could only be financed by the state. This meant that the state could not be easily replaced by a more decentralized system of authority. In Western Europe, feudal property could be transformed gradually into privately owned, alienable property in land. In India, communal land ownership made this impossible, thereby blocking the development of commercial agriculture and free markets. Since "Oriental despotism" inhibited the indigenous development of economic modernization, British domination became the agent of economic modernization.

Marx's analysis of colonialism as a progressive force bringing modernization to a backward feudal society sounds like a transparent rationalization for foreign domination. His account of British domination, however, reflects the same ambivalence that he shows towards capitalism in Europe. In both cases, Marx recognizes the immense suffering brought about during the transition from feudal to bourgeois society while insisting that the transition is both necessary and ultimately progressive. He argues that the penetration of foreign commerce will cause a social revolution in India. For Marx, this upheaval has both positive and negative consequences. When peasants lose their traditional livelihoods, there is a great deal of human suffering, but he also points out that traditional village communities are hardly idyllic; they are sites of caste oppression, slavery, misery, and cruelty. The first stage of the modernization process is entirely negative, because poor people pay heavy taxation to support British rule and endure the economic upheaval that results from the glut of cheaply produced English cotton. Eventually, however, British merchants begin to realize that Indians cannot pay for imported cloth or British administration if they don't efficiently produce goods to trade, which provides an incentive for British investment in production and infrastructure. Even though Marx believed that British rule was motivated by greed and exercised through cruelty, he felt it was still the agent of progress. Thus,

Marx's discussion of British rule in India has three dimensions: an account of the progressive character of foreign rule, a critique of the human suffering involved, and a concluding argument that British rule must be temporary if the progressive potential is to be realized.

Lenin developed his analysis of Western economic and political domination in his pamphlet Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917) (see Other Internet Resources). Lenin took a more explicitly critical view of imperialism. He noted that imperialism was a technique which allowed European countries to put off the inevitable domestic revolutionary crisis by exporting their own economic burdens onto weaker states. Lenin argued that late-nineteenth century imperialism was driven by the economic logic of late-capitalism. The falling rate of profit caused an economic crisis that could only be resolved through territorial expansion. Capitalist conglomerates were compelled to expand beyond their national borders in pursuit of new markets and resources. In a sense, this analysis is fully consistent with Marx, who saw European colonialism as continuous with the process of internal expansion within states and across Europe. Both Marx and Lenin thought that colonialism and imperialism resulted from the same logic that drove the economic development and modernization of peripheral areas in Europe. But there was one distinctive element of Lenin's analysis. Since late capitalism was organized around national monopolies, the competition for markets took the form of military competition between states over territories that could be dominated for their exclusive economic benefit.

Marxist theorists including Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky, and Nikolai Bukharin also explored the issue of imperialism. Kautsky's position is especially important because his analysis introduced concepts that continue to play a prominent role in contemporary world systems theory and post-colonial studies. Kautsky challenges the assumption that imperialism would lead to the development of the areas subjected to economic exploitation. He suggests that imperialism is a relatively permanent relationship structuring the interactions between two types of countries. (Young 2001) Although imperialism initially took the form of

military competition between capitalist countries, it would result in collusion between capitalist interests to maintain a stable system of exploitation of the non-developed world. The most influential contemporary proponent of this view is Immanuel Wallerstein, who is known for world-systems theory. According to this theory, the world-system is a relatively stable set of relations between core and peripheral states. This international division of labor is structured to benefit the core states (Wallerstein 1974–1989) and transfers resources from the periphery to the core.

12.2 'THE HOLY TRINITY'

Said's Orientalism which appeared in 1978 is a good starting point for us. Said sees Orientalism as a discourse by which European culture was able to manage and even produce the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-enlightenment period. Said states: Taking the eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be defined as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ding over it, in short Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient (p.3). On page 3 itself, Said acknowledges that he had found it useful to employ Foucault's notion of discourse as described by him in The Archeology of Knowledge and Discipline and Punish. A very important statement which Said makes on page 12 of Orientalism is: Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship or institutions, nor is it a large and diffuse collection of texts about the orient nor is it representative and expressive of a nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Orient World'. It is rather a distribution of geographical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological and philosophical text; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction but also a whole sense of 'interests'. Said's book establishes that stereotypes and general ideology about the orient as 'the other' have helped to produce myths about the laziness, deceit and irrationality of Orientals. By means of the discourse

of orientalism, Western cultural institutions are responsible for the creation of those 'othzrs'. The Orientals' very difference from the Occident helps establish that opposition by which Europe's own identity can be established. The knowledge of the Orient created by and embodied within the discourse of Orientalism serves to construct an image of the Orient and the Orientals as subservient and subject to domination by the Occident. The knowledge of 'subject races' or 'Orientals' makes their management easy and profitable. Knowledge of the Orient is generated out of strength and such strength-generated knowledge, in turn, 'creates' the Orient, the Oriental and hislher world. In most cases the Oriental is 'contained' and 'represented' by dominating frameworks and the encoding and comparison of the orient with the West ensures in the long run that oriental culture and perspectives are a deviation and a perversion that justify an inferior status for the latter. The Orient is seen as essentially monolithic with an unchdnging history, while the Occident is dynamic with an active history. Not only that, the Orient and the Oriental are seen-to be passive, non-participatory 'objects' of study. The Orient, in that sense, was sought to be established as a textual construct. On page 36 of his book Said states: Knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control. The whole thing thus becomes an on-going project. These then are the essentials of Said's formulations about 'Orientalism'. Let us now move to the essentials of Gayatri Spivak's notion of 'subalternity'. Spivak is a leading contemporary feminist deconstructionist who pays careful attention to issues of gender and race. Her use of the term 'subaltern' is influenced by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci consistently referred to a subordinate position in terms of class, gender, race and culture. Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' addressed the way the 'subaltern' woman is constructed, as absent or silent or not listened to. The 'muteness' of women in postcolonial societies is the main issue which her work confronts. The main argument of her essay is that, between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of woman disappears not into a pristine nothingness, but into a marginal position between tradition and modernization. , Spivak uses the

term 'subaltern' (of lower rank) for women, blacks, the colonized and the working class. Subalternity comes to suggest the repressive dominance of white Western thinking and an allegory of the displacement of the gendered and colonized (i.e. subaltern) subject, by the imposition of narratives of internationalism and nationalism. The violence inflicted by Western forms of thought upon the East is of great concern to Spivak. She takes 'the third world' to be a creation of the west that locks non-western cultures into an imperial representation. 'Worlding' is the name she gives to the process through which 'colonized space' is 'brought into the world; that is made to exist as part of a world essentially constituted by Eurocentrism. In these kinds of formulations one of the possible pitfalls is attributing an absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in creating the native and not making enough room for the resistance of the native. That brings us to Bhabha, the third figure in 'the Holy Trinity' and to his key notion that is 'mimicry'. 'Mimicry' designates a gap between the norm of civility as presented by European Enlightenment and its distorted colonial imitation. It serves as the sly weapon of anticolonial civility and is an ambivalent mixture of deference and disobedience. To Bhabha the operations of the unconscious in the imperial context are far from simple because desire for, as well as fear of, 'the other', does not allow the identities of the colonizer and the colonized to stay fixed and unitary. Colonial power undermines its own authority and can paradoxically provide the means for native resistance. The site of resistance, the strategic reversal of the process of domination that looks the colonial power squarely in the eye, is marked by 'hybridity', an 'in-between' space. It not only displaces the history that creates it,,but sets up new structures of authority and generates new political initiatives. It undermines authority because it imitates it only outwardly. On account of the difficulty of categorizing different cultures into universalist frameworks, Bhabha finds the idea of the 'nation' a little problematic. He thinks that the idea stems from the imposition of a rather arbitrary 'national' character upon a necessarily very heterogeneous collection of people(s).

12.3 SAID ON HEART OF DARKNESS

The thrust of Said's 1966 book Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography are somewhat different from his comments on Conrad's Heart of Darkness in Culture and Imperialism (1943). On page 25 of the latter book, Said states: This narrative is connected directly with the redemptive force, as well as the waste and horror of Europe's mission in the dark world. 'Whatever is lost or elided or simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling recitation is compensated for in the narrative's sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward movement. To Said, the imperialist politics and aesthetics which Heart of Darkness embodies was in the closing years of the nineteenth century aesthetics, politics and epistemology which were almost unavoidable and inevitable. The strength of Said's reading in this case is in his balancing of the aesthetic and the political. That is something which one cannot say about the reaction of someone like Chinua Achebe who saw Heart of Darkness as 'out and out' a racist book. In the same vein Rudyard Kipling's Kinz (which does not figure in your course) is seen by Said as a great document of its aesthetic moment, the realization of a great and cumulative process, which, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, is reaching its last major moment before 1ndia's independence; on the one hand, surveillance and control over India: on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail (Culture and Imperialism, p. 195) These kinds of readings are more open than those which merely refute, challenge and oppose. Most 'high modernist' texts deserve and demand a reading of that kind in view of their con~plexity and of the irony that mostly goes into their making. The general characteristic of reading in postcolonial criticism is that a text is 'read back' from the perspective of the colonized. Such reading characteristically rejects the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature and seeks to show its limitations of outlook especially its general inability to empathize across boundaries of cultural and ethnic difference.

12.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF POST COLONIALISM

Postcolonial theory is a body of thought primarily concerned with accounting for the political, aesthetic, economic, historical, and social

impact of European colonial rule around the world in the 18th through the 20th century. Postcolonial theory takes many different shapes and interventions, but all share a fundamental claim: that the world we inhabit is impossible to understand except in relationship to the history of imperialism and colonial rule. This means that it is impossible to conceive of "European philosophy," "European literature," or "European history" as existing in the absence of Europe's colonial encounters and oppression around the world. It also suggests that colonized world stands at the forgotten center of global modernity. The prefix "post" of "postcolonial theory" has been rigorously debated, but it has never implied that colonialism has ended; indeed, much of postcolonial theory is concerned with the lingering forms of colonial authority after the formal end of Empire. Other forms of postcolonial theory are openly endeavoring to imagine a world after colonialism, but one which has yet to come into existence. Postcolonial theory emerged in the US and UK academies in the 1980s as part of a larger wave of new and politicized fields of humanistic inquiry, most notably feminism and critical race theory. As it is generally constituted, postcolonial theory emerges from and is deeply indebted to anticolonial thought from South Asia and Africa in the first half of the 20th century. In the US and UK academies, this has historically meant that its focus has been these regions, often at the expense of theory emerging from Latin and South America. Over the course of the past thirty years, it has remained simultaneously tethered to the fact of colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century and committed to politics and justice in the contemporary moment. This has meant that it has taken multiple forms: it has been concerned with forms of political and aesthetic representation; it has been committed to accounting for globalization and global modernity; it has been invested in reimagining politics and ethics from underneath imperial power, an effort that remains committed to those who continue to suffer its effects; and it has been interested in perpetually discovering and theorizing new forms of human injustice, from environmentalism to human rights. Postcolonial theory has influenced the way we read texts, the way we understand national and transnational histories, and the way we understand the political implications of our own knowledge as scholars.

Despite frequent critiques from outside the field (as well as from within it), postcolonial theory remains one of the key forms of critical humanistic interrogation in both academia and in the world.

There are a number of good introductions to postcolonial theory. Unique to postcolonial theory, perhaps, is that while each introductory text explains the field and its interventions, alliances, and critiques, it also subtly (or not) argues for a particular variety of postcolonial criticism. Loomba 2005 gives an overall sense of the field, and the theoretical relationships between colonialism and Postcolonialism. Given that postcolonial theory has repeatedly come under attack from outside (and from within) the field, these introductions often argue for the necessity of the field, seen most vibrantly in Gandhi 1998 and Young 2003. Additionally, there have been a number of very helpful edited volumes, each of which take place at key points in the field's history, that keep important texts in circulation where they might not otherwise be available; among these remain Williams and Chrisman 1994 and Afzal-Khan and Seshadri-Crooks 2000. Because so much postcolonial theory is built on or responds to colonial texts, Harlow and Carter 2003, a two-volume set of colonial documents, is a necessary resource to scholars at all levels. Young 2001, an understated "historical introduction" to postcolonialism, is an invaluable resource. For students interested in psychoanalytic or psychological approaches to postcolonial theory, Hook 2012 is a good resource.

Post-colonial Theory

From the perspective of world-systems theory, the economic exploitation of the periphery does not necessarily require direct political or military domination. In a similar vein, contemporary literary theorists have drawn attention to practices of representation that reproduce a logic of subordination that endures even after former colonies gain independence. The field of postcolonial studies was influenced by Edward Said's path-breaking book Orientalism. In Orientalism Said applied Michel Foucault's technique of discourse analysis to the production of

knowledge about the Middle East. The term orientalism described a structured set of concepts, assumptions, and discursive practices that were used to produce, interpret, and evaluate knowledge about non-European peoples. Said's analysis made it possible for scholars to deconstruct literary and historical texts in order to understand how they reflected and reinforced the imperialist project. Unlike previous studies that focused on the economic or political logics of colonialism, Said drew attention to the relationship between knowledge and power. By foregrounding the cultural and epistemological work of imperialism, Said was able to undermine the ideological assumption of value-free knowledge and show that "knowing the Orient" was part of the project of dominating it. Orientalism can be seen as an attempt to extend the geographical and historical terrain of the poststructuralist critique of Western epistemology.

Said uses the term Orientalism in several different ways. First, Orientalism is a specific field of academic study about the Middle East and Asia, albeit one that Said conceives quite expansively to encompass history, sociology, literature, anthropology and especially philology. He also identifies it as a practice that helps define Europe by creating a stable depiction of its other, its constitutive outside. Orientalism is a way of characterizing Europe by drawing a contrasting image or idea, based on a series of binary oppositions (rational/irrational, mind/body, order/chaos) that manage and displace European anxieties. Finally, Said emphasizes that it is also a mode of exercising authority by organizing and classifying knowledge about the Orient. This discursive approach is distinct both from the materialist view that knowledge is simply a reflection of economic or political interests and from the idealist view that scholarship is disinterested and neutral. Following Foucault, Said describes discourse as a form of knowledge that is not used instrumentally in service of power but rather is itself a form of power.

The second quasi-canonical contribution to the field of post-colonial theory is Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Spivak works within Said's problematic of representation but extends it to the

contemporary academy. Spivak questions the idea of transparent subaltern speech. When well-meaning scholars want to let the subaltern "speak for themselves" they hope that removing the intermediary (the expert, the judge, the imperial administrator, the local elite) will enable some authentic truth based on experience to emerge. But experience itself is constituted through representation; therefore denying the problem of representation does not make it go away but only makes it harder to recognize. The central claim of the essay is that "representation has not withered away." Since power is everywhere, even in language itself, transparency and authenticity are impossible; this means that the messy and controversial work of interpretation is necessary.

Aijaz Ahmad has argued that, despite Spivak's claims to be working within the Marxist tradition, her essays exhibit contempt for materialism, rationalism, and progress, the core features of Marxism (Ahmad 1997). According to Ahmad, Spivak is concerned with narratives of capitalism rather than the institutional structures and material effects of capitalism as a mode of production. Spivak's sharp criticism of movements that essentialize subaltern subjects casts doubt on the basic premise of Marxist politics, which privileges the proletariat as a group with shared, true interests that are produced by the capitalist system.

Vivek Chibber (2013) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007) have taken up these issues. In his influential book Provincializing Europe, Chakrabarty argues that distinctively European concepts such as disenchanted space, secular time, and sovereignty inform the social sciences. When these standards are treated as universal, the third world is seen as incomplete or lacking. Chibber challenges the position. Chibber advances a critique of Subaltern Studies and defends universal categories such as capitalism, class, rationality, and objectivity. He argues that these categories need not be reductionist or Eurocentric and that they are useful in illuminating the motivation of political actors and the structural constraints faced by leaders in countries such as India.

This debate reflects a tension that runs through the field of postcolonial studies. Although some thinkers draw on both Marxism and poststructuralism, the two theories have different goals, methods, and assumptions. In the humanities, postcolonial theory tends to reflect the influence of poststructuralist thought, while theorists of decolonization focus on social history, economics, and political institutions. Whereas postcolonial theory is associated with the issues of hybridity, diaspora, representation, narrative, and knowledge/power, theories of decolonization are concerned with revolution, economic inequality, violence, and political identity.

Some scholars have begun to question the usefulness of the concept post-colonial theory. Like the idea of the Scottish four-stages theory, a theory with which it would appear to have little in common, the very concept of post-colonialism seems to rely on a progressive understanding of history (McClintock 1992). It suggests, perhaps unwittingly, that the core concepts of hybridity, alterity,particularity, and multiplicity may lead to a kind of methodological dogmatism or developmental logic. Moreover, the term "colonial" as a marker of this domain of inquiry is also problematic in so far as it suggests historically implausible commonalities across territories that experienced very different techniques of domination. Thus, the critical impulse behind post-colonial theory has turned on itself, drawing attention to the way that it may itself be marked by the utopian desire to transcend the trauma of colonialism (Gandhi 1998).

Orientalism', 'subaltemity' and 'mimicry' are important aspects of the work of the three critics, One of the problems that Orientalism (the book) suffers from is (that it assumes) too readily that an unequivocal intention on the part of the West was always 4 realizcd through its discursive productions. The other two critics do not seem to give enough direct power and role to 'agency' on behalf of the colonized people. Also, Bhabha's style is so involved that an oppositional stance does not come through and is obscured by the meanderings of language. And yet the cumulative achievement of the three critics discussed in this unit has

been really admirable. There is all around us a new cultural politics of difference with all its inner complexities and subtle nuances. One of the challenges for postcolonial theory today is to come to terms with specific local conditions and with comparison that can be discerned in and between them. There is also the daunting task of trying to know the story of colonial and neo-colonial engagements in all their complexity. Finding a proper language and terminology for representing those engagements is another major challenge. he three critics taken up here have done more than most others ip indicating some of the directions that can be fruitfully followed, sometimes aided by poststructuralism and postmodernism.

Some more general charges, however, remain. Aijaz Ahmad an Indian critic objects that postcolonial theorists 'live and do their theories' in First World countries and that (in Ahmad's view) affects the impact of their work. Arif Dirlik sees the postcolonial intellectual as complicitous in feeding into the goals of the capitalist frame of postcolonial theory. Kwame Appaiah argues that the 'post' of postcolonial theory and postmodernism are spaces created by capitalism to market cultural products in the developing world.

The legitimacy of colonialism has been a longstanding concern for political and moral philosophers in the Western tradition. At least since the Crusades and the conquest of the Americas, political theorists have struggled with the difficulty of reconciling ideas about justice and natural law with the practice of European sovereignty over non-Western peoples. In the nineteenth century, the tension between liberal thought and colonial practice became particularly acute, as dominion of Europe over the rest of the world reached its zenith. Ironically, in the same period when most political philosophers began to defend the principles of universalism and equality, the same individuals still defended the legitimacy of colonialism and imperialism. One way of reconciling those apparently opposed principles was the argument known as the “civilizing mission,” which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for “uncivilized” societies

to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government.

The goal of this entry is to analyze the relationship between Western political theory and the project of colonialism. After providing a more thorough discussion of the concept of colonialism, this entry will explain how European thinkers justified, legitimized, and challenged political domination. The third section focuses on liberalism and the fourth section briefly discusses the Marxist tradition, including Marx's own defense of British colonialism in India and Lenin's anti-imperialist writings. The fifth section provides an introduction to contemporary "post-colonial theory." This approach has been particularly influential in literary studies because it draws attention to the diverse ways that postcolonial subjectivities are constituted and resisted through discursive practices. The final section will introduce an Indigenous critique of settler-colonialism that emerges both as a response to colonial practices of domination and dispossession of land, customs and traditional history and to post-colonial theories of universalism. The goal of the entry is to provide an overview of the vast and complex literature that explores the theoretical issues emerging out of the experience of European colonization.

Recognition and Revolt in Settler-Colonial States

Indigenous scholars have articulated a critique of post-colonialism, noting that the concept obscures the continued existence of settler-colonial states. One point of controversy in contemporary Indigenous political theory literature is the extent to which it is desirable to participate in colonial legal and political institutions in order to transform them. At the center of this debate is the question of whether institutional accommodation aimed towards reconciliation advances indigenous interests or further reproduces the conditions of domination that only perpetuate the historical settler-colonial relationship. One group of scholars emphasizes the politics of refusal and resurgence. In Mohawk Interruptus: A Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States (2014), Audra Simpson argues that the contemporary democratic practices of

recognition transform indigenous peoples from sovereign nations into ethnic minority citizens. She suggests that the struggle for self-government requires a politics of refusal. The problem with the politics of reconciliation is that it remains in a system that is guided by the logic of Western liberalism and structured by its attendant hierarchies. Resurgence is best achieved through the politics of refusal, which aims towards self-determination and sovereignty through the reintegration of Indigenous culture and customs.

In Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways to Action and Freedom (2005) Taiaiake Alfred argues that meaningful change to the colonial condition requires a lasting transformation of society through Indigenous resurgence. According to Alfred, Indigenous reintegration cannot take place within the Western liberal framework because the imperatives of capitalism contrast sharply with those of the Indigenous ways of life. Therefore, liberal attempts at reconciliation will always run counter to the self-determination efforts of Indigenous communities. In Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence (2011) Leanne Betasamosake Simpson points out that rebuilding needs to start from within, and Indigenous people require not only the re-establishment of pre-colonial history and customs but also the reintroduction of Indigenous traditions of governance and culture through the oral tradition of story-telling as a framework to inform social experience.

Glen Coulthard expands on the theoretical framework of resurgence and refusal in Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition (2014) and presents a critical analysis of the historical and political experiences of Indigenous people within Canada. Coulthard argues that the current methods of reconciliation tend to dehistoricize and neutralize acts of dispossession, violence, and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands and cultures. For Coulthard, settler colonialism is an ongoing process, not merely the legacy of past injustices. This is evident in the unsettled land claims, the dispossession of land, the limitations placed on Indigenous governments, and the

displacement of Indigenous ways of life—which are tied to access to traditional territories. Rather than relying on recognition from within the colonial-settler relationship, Coulthard advocates for Indigenous sovereignty informed by an intellectual, social, political, and artistic movement that embodies a "self-reflective revitalization" of traditional values, principles, and cultural practices.

The title of Coulthard's book alludes to Black Skin, White Masks (1952), the path-breaking work by Frantz Fanon. Writing in the 1950s, Fanon challenged the abstract universalism of Western philosophy, showing how universalism serves to structure a hierarchical relationship between settler and colonized. Fanon's critical theory challenges the assumption that European notions of progress truly advance justice and secure mutual benefit. In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon focuses on the development of black consciousness by exploring the psychological alienation and displacement caused by colonial domination. He describes a divided self who identifies with French culture even while experiencing exclusion from the ideals of universalism, equality, and reason. Coulthard's reading of Fanon sheds light on his view that cultural recognition by the colonial state is a solution. Following Fanon, he concludes that paternalist recognition serves to legitimize the colonial state and further divide indigenous subjects.

Other scholars, however, argue that it is possible to achieve successful reconciliation through democratic deliberation and procedures. In This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy (2006) Dale Turner suggests that the way to undermine the power dynamics that perpetuate the conditions of colonialism is through the participation within the legal and political institutions of the Canadian state. Turner argues that "word warriors," who mediate between Indigenous communities and legal and political institutions, should ensure the preservation and expansion of Indigenous rights within the larger community. Turner argues that an effective relationship between the Canadian and Indigenous peoples will only emerge out of a dialogue grounded in democratic presumptions of equality and respect. This

dialogue entails that Indigenous peoples, to establish claims of cultural distinctiveness, learn how to engage within the Canadian's state's legal and political discourses in more effective ways (2006:5).

The struggle for Indigenous self-determination is not unique to Canada. Rather, Indigenous movements towards self-determination have emerged across North and South America, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and other territories. Scholars, such as Ronald Niezen (2003), Will Kymlicka (2013), and Sheryl Lightfoot (2016), have written on the subject of indigenous peoples' international struggles for individual and collective rights. International recognition-based models have gained momentum since the 2007 United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Lightfoot highlights the revolutionary potential of international movements to enable a collective voice where local struggles may strategically coalesce on a global platform. Acknowledging local variations, Indigenous people have developed a movement beyond national borders that strive to recognize the political autonomy by addressing issues surrounding land rights and cultural distinctiveness.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss concept: 'The Holy Trinity'.
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2. Discuss about what is on Heart of Darkness?
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3. Describe The Importance of Post colonialism.
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12.5 LET US SUM UP

Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha are said to be 'the Holy Trinity' of postcolonial, theory. Having said that, it becomes'important to point out that their workcannot be clubbed together in any homogeneous way. Each of them is different and important for the contributions she has made to the field. Said's main contribution to the field is the concept of 'orientalism' - the attempt on the part of the West to establish the East as lazy, deceitful and irrational. Spivak answers the question 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' with a 'No'. Women are 'doubly effaced' in Spivak's scheme of things. Bhabha's theorizing about 'mimicry' builds on the potential for irreverence and mockery in the colonizer/colonized relationship. All three critics are influenced by Foucault's views on power and discourse. Additionally, Spivak is influenced by Derrida and Bhabha by Lacan. All three draw on other resources as well.

12.6 KEY WORDS

Hegemony: In the work of the Italian Marxist thinker Gramsci, the word is used to account for the way in which a ruling class maintains itself in power.

Subaltern: of lower rank.

Mimicry: The fact that the colonizer in his/her relationship with the colonized is always vulnerable to the irreverence and mockery beneath the seeming servility of the colonised.

12.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What is the main argument of Edward Said's book Orientalism?
2. How have Foucault's view on discourse and power influenced Said's Orientalism?
3. What does Spivak mean by 'subalternity?' What distresses her about the condition of women in colonial societies?
4. What does Bhabha mean by 'mimicry' in the colonial context?
5. Discuss concept: 'The Holy Trinity'
6. Discuss about what is on Heart of Darkness?
7. Describe The Importance of Post colonialism.

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12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 12.2
2. See Section 12.3
3. See Section 12.4

UNIT 13: POST-COLONIALISM AND GENDER

STRUCTURE

13.0Objectives

13.1Introduction

13.2Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Feminism

13.2.1 Colonialism

13.2.2 Postcolonialism: A Discourse

13.2.3 Postcolonial Feminism: Colonization and Subjugation of Women

13.3Characteristics of Postcolonial Feminism

13.3.1 Indigenous Cultural Criticism

13.3.2 Heterogeneity, Plurality and Inclusion

13.3.3 Double Colonization of Women

13.3.4 From Margin to Centre

13.3.5 Parallelism and Intersection

13.4Postcolonial Feminist Theorists

13.5.1 Edward Said: Orientalism

13.5.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak?

13.5.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Subaltern Can Speak

13.5.4 Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Third World Feminist

13.5.5 Feminism in India: Silent and Steady

13.5 Postcolonial Feminism: A Critique

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13.9 Suggested readings and references

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13.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the relationship between colonialism and postcolonialism;
- Examine the characteristics of postcolonial feminism;
- Analyze the contribution of a few important postcolonial feminist theorists; and
- Situate postcolonial feminism in the context of third world feminism in general.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Feminist theory consists of several strands which include formative feminisms, multicultural feminism, feminism and history, postcolonial feminism, third world feminism, transnational feminism or global feminism, eco-feminism, and black feminism. Feminist theories emerged from the experiences of women under different social, political, and economic situations, and were influenced by the social and moral philosophies of the time. Academic scholarship arising from these theories led to activism in the form of social movements. Early feminist theories had a tendency to lump all women together and treat them as homogenously marginalised. In order to highlight a common sisterhood, they often ignored the social, cultural and racial differences that divide women. Postcolonial feminism has emerged in an attempt to address the experiences of women born and raised in former colonies of western imperial powers. It argues that these experiences are different from those of women who live in the western world. It draws comparisons between colonization and women's suppression in the light of geographical, historical and cultural factors. The field of postcolonialism is vast and open to debates and questions from national, cultural, political, and social arenas. In this unit, we will look at postcolonial feminism's concerns with issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural differences. We will also examine the power relations in order to come to a more subtle understanding of the dimensions of neo-colonial domination.

13.2 COLONIALISM, POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM

13.2.1 Colonialism

You may have come across this term/ concept in your readings of other disciplines. Can you make sense of it here? We shall use the terms 'colonialism' and 'postcolonialism' often in this unit. For further understanding, you may note that 'colonialism' refers to the policy of having colonies to keep them dependent on the colonizers, so that colonized nations may be used and exploited as material, economic resources by the colonial powers. It also refers to the trait of colonial life in all its aspects. The impact of colonialism is in terms of territories appropriated (geographic), racism institutionalized Postcolonial Feminism (historic), and civilizations destroyed (cultural). Therefore, colonialism forms the origin of postcolonial discussion. The colonial history of the nineteenth century was marked by western imperial appropriation whereas the twentieth century witnessed a reversal with the colonies and empires becoming independent. Postcolonial theory emerges out of this dialectical process of oppression and struggle for freedom from oppression. Colonization is a general term denoting various phenomena in political theory, feminist and Marxian writings. Marxian theory uses it as a category of economic exploitation. Feminist scholars use the term to describe "the appropriation of their experience and struggles" (Mohanty, 1988, p.49).

13.2.2 Postcolonialism: A Discourse

In comparison to colonialism, postcolonial discourse is the discourse of the colonized/oppressed. Since there is ongoing interrogation and knowledge addition within this discursive realm, it does not end with the departure of the colonizers. On an ongoing basis, postcolonialism contends with various forms of oppression. Postcolonialism has multiple meanings: • First, it is a literal description of conditions in former colonial societies. • Second, it is a description of global conditions after independence of these colonies. In this case, the usage is more abstract

since it is primarily discursive and textual. • Third, it describes the above named conditions as a branch of knowledge. The differences between the usages have to be understood for our analytical purpose. There is a developing interest in the third aspect, that is, postcolonialism as a branch of knowledge, and this interest has grown in diversity in recent times. Postcolonialism as used by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (1989) describes all cultures affected by the process of colonialism and imperial power from the beginning of colonization to the present. It is argued that the countries formerly occupied by colonial powers continue to be affected by their former history of colonization, and thus the colonized continue to suffer the consequences of their history. Thus defined, postcoloniality is released from the fixity of location and history of colonization and is identified with discourse. Discourse refers to written or spoken communications or debates. Postcolonial theory is a critical study of colonial texts, both literary and non-literary. One of the most prominent and well-known scholars associated with postcolonial studies, Edward Said, initiated the discourse/debate on postcolonialism with the publication of his famous book Orientalism. There are other significant contributions to the origin of postcolonialism such as The Empire Writes Back and other similar works from African, Caribbean and Indian writers and social theorists. These writers and theorists engaged with postcolonial discourses and hence postcolonial studies found a place in the academy. Their contributions are given in subsequent sections of this unit. One needs to take note of the fact that postcolonial discourse is interdisciplinary and ranges from discourse on history to research of colonial governments to literary analysis, from critique of scientific work to economic theory. Ania Loomba (1998) sums up postcolonialism as a new critical vocabulary emerging from recent developments in social sciences, literature, linguistic studies, and discourses in the varied forms of communications. The term postcolonialism earlier referred exclusively to the writings (discourses) and practices produced by the history of colonization with its new symbolism. It is now more of an abstraction figuratively applied to any strategic redefinition of marginality. According to Sara Suleri, "This

reimaging of the postcolonial has made way for the theoretical articulation and has enabled the coalition between postcolonial and feminist theories" (Suleri in Ashcroft et al, 1995). Postcoloniality articulates its theories alongside economic, social, cultural and historical factors. In practice, it works differently in different parts of the world. It conveys patriarchy as a relationship of inequality that is highly variable because it is to be considered always along with the other social structures. For all the above reasons, we need caution and qualification when using the term postcolonialism.

13.2.3 Postcolonial Feminism: Colonization And Subjugation Of Women

Postcolonial feminists find parallels between colonialism and the subjugation of women. The western feminists had a narrow focus on the general belief that all women should be equal to men and emphasized the sameness and solidarity of women, irrespective of their manifold cultural, social, and economic differences. They did not examine the nuances and ambiguities of different cultures. Imperial colonization was associated with the belief that westerners were superior and the colonized were inferior races and, therefore, had to be civilized. Postcolonial feminists object to the idea of the commonality and universality of women's lives, since these were generally based on the universalization of western women's experiences, and wanted their own voices 385 to be heard. Through the lens of colonialism, they were able to explore a lot Postcolonial Feminism of issues relating to subordination, such as migration, slavery, representation, suppression and resistance, rather than treating gender in a simplistic sense. They believe that gender cannot be extricated from other aspects of their identity and also one cannot gloss over the differences between the western and third world countries. Postcolonial feminism has thus opened up areas and topics for academic studies and research that provide a more nuanced picture of women's lives from around the world. Postcolonial feminist theories provide the analytic tools to address issues of structural inequities in groups that historically have been socially and economically disadvantaged through the creation of an intellectual discourse which can adequately reflect the

struggle of women outside the western world. The specific goals of postcolonial theorists and feminists are quite similar. Let us summarize them as follows:

i) They both seek not only to salvage past experiences but also to chart how the world can move beyond colonialism towards equality and opportunity for all.

ii) Postcolonial theory exposes and deconstructs the racist imperialist nature of colonialism and its ongoing global and material consequences. Third world women are the most exploited and therefore, a new form of international feminist agency is warranted to speak on behalf of all women.

iii) Postcolonial theory claims intellectual authority by claiming space for multiple voices. For instance, Gayatri Spivak's voicing of the subaltern ('Can the subaltern Speak?', 1995) which includes women metaphorically and Edward Said's attack on orientalism (Orientalism, 1978) make bold to disregard the established views of western colonial writings.

iv) Gayatri Spivak suggests the use of a "strategic essentialism" by incorporating the subaltern voice of the marginalized and silenced as a strategic and necessary position from which to speak and to be heard. Thus, the conceptualisation of the subaltern provides a social category of power structures. By speaking on behalf of a group (representation), postcolonial discourse is able to carve out a clear oppositional identity.

v) As presented by the African American feminist Bell Hooks, marginality is a site of resistance. We can find parallels between postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminism in all the above mentioned goals/objectives.

Third World Feminism/ Tri-Continental Feminism

Postcolonial feminism is sometimes also called third world feminism. The term 'third world feminism' is preferred by some feminists for reasons of precision and context. Historically, the third world countries

have been under colonialism and liberated through struggle against foreign power and are characteristically postcolonial. In 1970, black feminist Frances Beal's publication Sisterhood is Powerful named the second wave feminism as a white women's movement since it insisted on organizing along the binary gender division of male/female alone and tended to ignore differences of race, culture, or class. However, US third world feminists were conscious that one's race or class often determined access to privileges regardless of one's gender. This type of consciousness was especially pertinent during the suffragette movement in the US. For instance, Sojourner Truth (a famous Black female abolitionist and women's rights activist) found it necessary to repeatedly confront a convention of American white women with the question, "Ain't I a woman?" This statement which is often quoted in feminist literature carries with it the imprint of race, culture, class, and gender and has become very significant in US third world feminism. As stated by Chela Sandoval, this form of "historical consciousness" enabled a different way of conceptualizing feminist consciousness and became a counter to western feminism (Sandoval, 2003, p.75).

The US third world feminists put forth some common views and a theoretical structure different from western feminism. Similar to postcolonial feminist discourses, the notion of the third world is a 'cultural production' symbolizing historical and cultural suppression experienced by those countries. Third world women's writings focus on codification of scholarship as knowledge about women. 'Third world women' thus denotes an analytical category found in feminist writings. While the two streams of feminists within the west, western and US third world, have two different understandings of domination, subordination, and the nature of effective resistance, third world feminism reflects similar feminist concerns and ideology with US third world feminism. 'Third world' is a term popularly used to refer to the three geographical regions covered by Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the twentieth century, the development debates of the seventies used the terms North-South to emphasize the contrast between developed and developing countries.

The term ‘Tri-Continental’ is considered more exact than the ‘third world’ in order to denote international identification. The First Conference of the Organization of Solidarity of People of Africa, Asia and Latin America held at Havana in 1966 resolved to insist on the ‘Tri-Continental’ instead of ‘Third world’ which 387 was seen as a bland homogenization of ‘The South’ and the negative definition Postcolonial Feminism of the non- west. In summary, the theory of postcolonial feminism is clear evidence of the fact that there exist feminisms indigenous to the third world countries. The concerns and analyses of third world feminists are rooted in and responsive to the problem women face within their national contexts. By and large, third world/ postcolonial feminism questions, challenges and even contradicts western feminism. Women’s movements speak in different voices since each of them has a different thrust influenced by different socio- cultural, political, and economic situations. Only within a specific socio-economic and political context, is it possible for women to have similar concerns and points of commonality. In the next section, we will look more closely at the specific characteristics of postcolonial feminism.

13.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

13.3.1 Indigenous Cultural Criticism

As you have seen above, postcolonialism was born out of the cultural critique of dominant, hegemonic powers wherever they may be. Academic discourses produced by writers of erstwhile colonized countries of the third world set the pace for this type of cultural criticism. These writings highlighted the ongoing resistance to colonialism. They undertook the study of cultural practices, extant and surviving, with a heightened emphasis on local and specific effects of colonialism and oppression. In short, postcolonial studies refer to a large and growing body of diverse and often conflicting formulations of the cultural production or writings and debates of oppressed people. Like feminist studies, it critiques the status quo. It is not a discipline or methodology as

such, but rather a theoretical and cultural perspective. The cultural criticism generated by postcolonial feminism is leveled against the first and second wave feminisms which are entirely western in conception, origin, and development. Postcolonial feminism is critical of the fact that the 388 Feminist Theories western constructions of indigenous women do not reflect the real cultural situations of these women. According to postcolonial feminists like Chandra Mohanty, mainstream western feminism represents the other women as ‘a composite, singular, third world woman’. Mohanty, an Indian feminist, reveals that this perception reflects an arbitrary construction. Western feminism homogenizes and systematizes the oppression of women without situating them in their culture, ideology and socioeconomic conditions which are different for different groups. Third world feminists raise serious objections to the consideration of women as “already constituted and coherent groups with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or radical location… The notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy cannot be applied universally and cross culturally” (Mohanty, 1988, p.52). The exclusion and marginalization of women within national cultures is true of many countries which gained independence in the twentieth century. Exclusions based on race, gender and class may be culturally inherent. Women’s struggle for equality still continues even after liberation and thus reaffirms the need for, and relevance of, the discourse of postcoloniality. Postcolonial feminist theory analyzes the relation between western women and indigenous women. Western women used their campaigning skills to advocate the rights of indigenous women drawing attention to the socio-cultural practices of sati, veiling, female seclusion, and other forms of patriarchal oppression. In the colonies of Africa and India, European women campaigned for the rights of indigenous women. Whether their advocacy improved the lives of indigenous women is debatable. The writings of Chandra Mohanty and Hazel Carby (White Women Listen!) laid the foundation for the critique of western feminism for having ignored cultural differences of women and became the main plank of postcolonial theorization. The assumption that what is progressive for western women is necessarily the best for women elsewhere has been strongly criticized and questioned. What was

vehemently opposed was the idea that women outside the west need to be saved by benevolent western feminists.

13.3.2 Heterogeneity, Plurality And Inclusion

Western feminists analyse women as a socially constituted homogeneous group across races, classes, and cultures. But women are also material subjects of their history. This means that women's experiences are not just influenced by their gender but also by the specific contexts of the historical situations that they live in. Since these will vary across time periods and cultures, it would become impossible to speak of all women as having common experiences, problems or traits. While a sexist approach might label women as weak and 389 emotional, similarly, the concept of women as 'sisters in struggle' might end Postcolonial Feminism up projecting third world women as powerless, exploited and sexually harassed, and in dire need of being rescued. There are varied reasons for powerlessness. Therefore, postcolonial feminist theory questions the above mentioned binary between the powerful west and the powerless non-west. The non-homogeneity (heterogeneity) of women is raised by feminists like Chandra Mohanty as a counter to the trend of universalisation of women in western feminist theory. The non-homogeneity of women is an obvious fact. Whatever be the approach to the analysis of women, they are a heterogeneous group differentiated by socio-economic, cultural and locational characteristics as well as by degrees of adjustment to cultural and economic process. Postcolonial feminism raises crucial questions of the plurality of women and the fact of seclusion that undermines the creation of a common, pluri-vocal language accessible for both men and women. Postcolonialism celebrates plurality through its explorations of marginality and heterogeneity. It rejects the universalisation of values and conventions. Edward Said identifies a kind of Eurocentric universalisation in Orientalism. The western representations of the East are questioned and their limitations and misrepresentations are exposed. These questions stress the need for recognition of plurality of womencentered experiences as located within their respective cultures and traditions and their critical revaluation of age-old cultural and religious mandates that have lost their present day

applicability. In effect, postcolonial feminism seeks to determine whether women can lay claim to their own rights of ownership of that culture. To sum up, postcolonial theory contradicts a universalized, homogenous concept of women and the exclusion of race, class and other factors in the analysis.

13.3.3 Double Colonization Of Women

The most significant issue of postcolonial writings is the status of women in third world countries and cultures. The term 'Double Colonization' introduced by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford (1988) has become a durable description of the two forms of dominance, patriarchy and imperialism and of women's status. Both forms of dominance, patriarchy and imperialism, are comparable and overlapping. Postcolonial feminist writings examine the role of white women in empire at the level of symbolism and also at the level of their functioning. Double colonization refers to women of colonized nations being doubly oppressed due to their race as well as their gender. It analyzes the concerns of women as members of marginalized groups within postcolonial societies, the case of indigenous minorities, and as women with a history of unbroken oppression.

13.3.4 From Margin To Centre

Postcolonial theory highlights the continued dominance of western ways of knowing. Like Gayatri Spivak, Joanne Sharp (2008) also argues that while western ways of knowing are accepted as the single voice of authenticity, other forms of knowing are marginalized by western thinkers since these are often relegated as myth or folklore. Postcolonial theorists have challenged western ways of knowing and writing, and this "single voiced authority" (Kalpana, 2003). Feminist Theory: from Margin to Centre (1984) authored by African-American feminist and cultural critic, bell hooks, is an important book in the countercanon of feminism. The importance of this work lies in the fact that it foregrounds and centers the black woman's point of view which had hitherto been in the "footnotes" of patriarchal discourses. When referring to issues of women, bell hooks observes that within feminism there are displaced

postcolonial notions and there is an urge to move to centre stage. Postcolonial feminist theories comprehend not only feminism of the third but also other marginalized peoples in the world. Postcolonial feminist theory uses the interconnections between gender, ethnicity, race and postcolonial history to draw attention to the issues of the marginalized. Political oppression and patriarchy are the main planks of postcolonial theories. Colonization and its material effects arising from dominant power structure were brought out both historically and culturally in postcolonial theory. Firstly, there are questions of relationship between western feminism and postcolonial people. Gayatri Spivak questions the prominence given to European cultural notions and values in western feminism. Secondly, the issue of language is a significant one since the bulk of postcolonial studies has been mainly in English. Language implies power. Third world writings used in western universities are primarily those written originally in English, even though translations from indigenous to dominant language and vice versa have recently provided a wider reader circle. Thirdly, postcolonial theory has enabled third world intellectuals to participate in global discourse. Although postcolonial experiences vary widely depending on each culture's specific history and culture, the discourse of postcolonialism has enabled all of these voices to find a central and powerful plank from which to share their common as well as different experiences.

13.3.5 Parallelism And Intersection

Postcolonial and feminist theories are parallel and convergent, and they intersect each other. Through symbolism of women and their sharing of 391 oppression and repression with colonized races and culture as colonized, Postcolonial Feminism western feminist theory and postcolonial theory run parallel to each other. Both feminist discourse and post-colonial theory have long been thought of as associative and even complementary. Possible similarities between the two can be summed up as follows: Both discourses are predominantly political and concern themselves with the struggle against oppression and injustice. Moreover, both reject the established hierarchical, patriarchal system, which is dominated by the hegemonic white male, and vehemently deny

the supposed supremacy of masculine power and authority. Imperialism, like patriarchy, is after all a phallocentric, supremacist ideology that subjugates and dominates its subjects. The oppressed woman is in this sense akin to the colonized subject. Essentially, exponents of post-colonialism are reacting against colonialism in the political and economic sense while feminist theorists are rejecting colonialism of a sexual nature.

(http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/keyconcepts/feminism-and- postcolonialism.htm) Further, the role of the intrusive 'male gaze' within both patriarchy and colonialism, defines women and natives in an equally oppressive manner. Both groups – women and colonized - are reduced to stereotypes (virgin, whore, savage, heathen) and denied an identity by the system that entraps them. For example, Zemon Davis (2003, p.135-160) identified striking similarities in the position of the Iroquois (original American Indian people) and white women in the colonial encounter. In addition to focusing on gender, postcolonial feminist theories examine the varied forms of exploitation not only at the level of government but on the ground level as well. As similar theories, both question the established hegemonic hierarchical system. A convergence of the two may be identified in their common focus on the marginalized and silenced, in relation to the dominant.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Feminism.
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2. What are the Characteristics of Postcolonial Feminism?

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13.4 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORISTS

Postcolonial feminists attempt to change the oppressive power relations encoded in the name of race, nation, and empire. They are especially concerned with issues of gender, class, and sexuality. Postcolonial feminist theories are inter-disciplinary and cut across the disciplines of philosophy, political science, human geography, sociology, economics, literature, and media. Notable postcolonial theorists include Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra Mohanty, with the latter two more specifically addressing issues of gender. Postcolonial feminist theory has a two-fold objective:

(i) to racialise mainstream feminist theory and

(ii) to genderise colonialism and post colonialism. Let us now look at the main ideas of a few postcolonial and feminist theorists whose work has been extremely influential in the area of postcolonial feminist studies.

13.5.1 Edward Said: Orientalism

Orientalism formed the basis for postcolonial theorization. The 'orient' refers to countries east of the Mediterranean. Historically, the term 'orient' meant the oldest colonies of the Europeans extending from India to the Far East. In orientalist discourse, cultural differences from the west were sexualized to categorize the oriental women (including Indian women) and contrasted with the superiority of the European women. In his famous book Orientalism (1978), Edward Said contends that orientalism or the study of the orient is ultimately a political vision which promotes a binary opposition between the familiar West and the strange East, the inferior 'other'. Said has thus paved the way for a new critique

of colonialist thought and development, a new area of enquiry, a colonial discourse. Said attributes a definite meaning to orientalism as follows: "Orientalism is a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient" (Said, 1978). Orientalism has thus become an academic discipline - referred to as Oriental Studies or Area Studies and denotes teaching, writing, and research on the orient in the varied disciplines of anthropology, sociology, history, philology, etc. Europeans systematically developed Orientalism in order to manage and produce the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively. Said adopted a different methodology by adapting Michel Foucault's notion of discourse and the close relationship between power and knowledge. According to Foucault (Archaeology of Knowledge, 1969), establishment of knowledges and disciplines is never innocent. Knowledge formation is also formation of power. Said observes that 'ideas, cultures and histories cannot be understood 393 or studied without their force'. They are relative to power. Therefore, power Postcolonial Feminism relations become the backdrop of the study of history and culture. In his theory of orientalism, Edward Said examines how the knowledges created by various orientalist disciplines have produced a discourse of questionable originality. Those orientalist discourses are responsible for the creation of the category 'other', the oriental as the binary opposite of the west. Conceptually, oriental women are different from their western counterparts. By redefining Oriental Studies and such western scholarship as orientalism, Said demonstrated its domination as a viewpoint over the oriental territories and people. Oriental scholars mostly produced discourses or texts depicting the East as West's inferior 'other' and itself as a superior civilization in their work in literature, political tracts, journalistic texts, travel books, religious and philological studies. Said consistently demonstrates western domination through the power of knowledge. In another publication Culture and Imperialism (1983), Said pays close attention to anti-colonial and postcolonial writing. Said's theory of Orientalism is ultimately a political vision of reality exposing the binary opposition between the West and East, Europe and Orient. Said's contribution to postcolonial criticism is immense and his work has served as a starting point for those

who came after him. Said's ideas have generated widespread interest and influence in English literature, history, comparative literature, anthology, sociology and enabled a very considerable amount of subsequent work, especially in terms of feminist intersections with postcolonial theory. Racism, even after the disappearance of colonization, still continues to mar public life with incidents of racial violence. Similarly, postcolonial feminist theory questions the exclusion of race in the analysis of women. Edward Said's work has been extremely influential in this regard since it opened up many questions which were taken up by postcolonial feminists in their ongoing struggle against racism and discrimination within the feminist movement.

13.5.2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can The Subaltern Speak?

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a cultural critic and feminist theorist of Indian origin. Her much quoted essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is considered to be one of the most important texts in postcolonial feminist theory. "Subaltern" originally means a commissioned army officer of lower rank than a captain, but the word has now entered the vocabulary of academic discourse, especially in cultural studies, to imply a subject who is marginalized and oppressed. As used in cultural studies, the term subaltern owes its source to Antonio Gramsci 394 Feminist Theories (Selections from Prison Notes, 1971) who adopted it to refer to those groups in society who are subject to the hegemony of ruling classes. The subaltern is a heterogamous group and cannot be easily or neatly categorized. Ranjit Gaha is the founder of Subaltern Study Group. He qualifies the subaltern as diverse, heterosexual and overlapping. Referring to herself as a Marxist, feminist-deconstructionist, Spivak questions the tendency of scholarly writings to exclude and marginalize the subalterns and especially those who happen to be women. Gayatri Spivak is, therefore, hailed as a pioneer in the area of literary and cultural theory for producing the most coherent account of the subaltern woman.

In her work, Spivak exposes how major works of European metaphysics (eg. Hegel, Kant, etc) not only tend to exclude the subaltern from

discussions but also actively prevent non-Europeans from occupying positions as full human subjects. Since women's groups may have different and changing needs and agendas, working for a common cause may become difficult. Moreover, such groups run the risk of becoming permanently identified with an essential and stable identity which may not be useful over a period of time. Spivak thus proposes the use of 'strategic essentialism' to enable women to fight for their rights from a political platform, without becoming permanently tied down to such a position or frozen identity. Spivak combines deconstructive theory with feminist and Marxist perspectives in her discourse on third world women within a global framework. The 'new knowledge' of the subaltern has thus created drastic revision in conceptualization and theorizing on women. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies postcolonial Indian women with a radical and economic underclass. She evokes the Hindu woman's subaltern position, her inaccessibility to 'voice' and her 'silenced difficult space of abjection.' Since women are twice colonized, the most oppressed of these women can be seen to be in the position of the subaltern. Spivak observes that there is no space from where the subaltern subject can speak. Spivak persistently critiques western feminism which fails to reexamine its own assumptions and takes them for granted. She comments that the west's intervention on behalf of the subaltern women is self interested. The feminist framework constructed by her has been fruitfully extended by other writers.

13.5.3 Homi K. Bhabha: The Subaltern Can Speak

Another postcolonial theorist, Homi K. Bhabha agrees with Spivak that the colonial (subaltern) is represented only within a disabling master discourse of colonialism. Such a discourse justifies itself by stressing on the degenerating nature of native population. Bhabha asserts that (woman) subaltern people can speak and that a native (woman's) voice can be recovered and is recovered in the readings of colonial texts and discourses, depending on reading Postcolonial Feminism strategies. Bell Ashcroft et al support Bhabha's views. "The existence of postcolonial discourse is an example of postcolonial speaking and in most cases the

dominant language is appropriated and is used for representation" (Ashcroft, 1995). The marginal voice, in fact, is heard. Said's Orientalism laid emphasis on imperialist discourses. In more recent times, there has been a growing focus on the previously neglected contributions of postcolonial voices who challenge oriental discourse and its domination. There are considerable texts as histories from below, recovering the experience of those hitherto hidden from history. These articulations are not all completely new either. Marxists feminists and even liberal historians, whose leitmotif was the masses, have tried to 'amplify the voices' of the oppressed over the years. In this respect, the theory of discourse of Bhabha (1994) gains significance.

13.5.4 Chandra Talpade Mohanty: Third World Feminist

According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, there is a difference between woman as constructed by 'diverse representational discourses' and women as real material subjects of histories. They are related only arbitrarily. Western feminist writings have 'colonized' the material and historical heterogeneities of women in third world in the form a homogenous 'third world woman'. This western feminist framework is critiqued by Mohanty. The first criticism focuses on strategies, location, or situation of women vis-à-vis the content analysis. Women of power and struggle are assumed as an already constituted group with identical interests and desires. The second critique is on the methodology by which universality and cross cultural validity are proved. The third concerns the political framework of the model. In short, generalizing and universalizing of women as a category is the major criticism made by postcolonial feminists.

The representation of third world women as traditional, feudal, and politically immature are challenged by Mohanty. In support of her critique, Chandra Mohanty uses examples of western feminists' representation of veiling (as a proxy for sexual segregation and control of women). This allows western feminist discourse to view third world women only in relation to negative aspects of their lives such as rape,

domestic violence, forced prostitution, and violation of basic human rights. Similarly, she cites the emphasis on concepts like reproduction, sexual division of labour, the family, marriage, household, patriarchy, etc which are used by western feminists without specifying local, cultural, and historical contexts to represent women's subordination . Additionally, she challenges the confusion of the use of gender with an analytical category in western feminist writings. Feminist Theories In sum, Chandra Mohanty strikes a blow at the monolithic, generalized representation of third world women. In particular, she warns against 'freezing the women in time, space and history'. She deconstructs the notion of a universalized sisterhood by documenting the experiences by women of colour in different societies including the dual system of discrimination articulated by male and female patriarchy.

13.5.5 Feminism In India: Silent And Steady

The common thread running through Indian feminism is that of a liberal position. Whatever is progressive for women in the west may not necessarily the best for women in India? The Indian feminist approach has been to 'observe, describe, take an objective realistic view' of women's conditions in their social set up. They question the double marginalization of illiterate, tribal and rural women as much as advocating their mainstreaming. One could say that there are roughly three main bodies of writings on women in India - colonial western, Indian nationalist feminist and current writings. The framework of Indian postcolonialism is essentially Marxist, with emphasis on the low caste, tribal, and what Gandhi termed as 'underdogs'. Its added concerns are peasantry and matters relating to agency, gender, and psychology. Non-orthodox concepts have also emerged in recent theoretical work which constructs a dialogue with international perspectives. Spivak and Bhabha's abstract works are best understood (subaltern studies group) in relation to the problem of Indian intellectual culture and its political history. Much of theoretical innovation on feminism took place simultaneously in India and by Indian intellectuals outside India who "created a dynamic field of intellectual energy providing much of the cuttings of postcolonial theory effectively by chalking out its

parameters" (Young, 2001, p. 351). Whereas feminist ideology stemmed from individualism in the West, in India, its impact was class based, silent but steady. Feminism in India is taking deep inroads without much of the hue and cry of the western feminists. Indian writers analyses various complex problems of contemporary life by examining indigenous way role relations and identities.

This includes Indian writings in English as well as vernacular regional writings. To sum up, postcolonial theory contradicts a universalized, homogenous concept of women and the exclusion of race in the analysis. Racial, cultural, and gendered oppressions have negated the right to equality. Decolonization in the metaphorical sense is the essence of postcolonial feminism. It goes beyond mere specificity and historic location. It includes a methodological revisionism. The centrality of western thought, construction of knowledge and production 397 (writings) are challenged. Such revisions provide the framework for Postcolonial Feminism postcolonial feminist theory.

13.5 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM: A CRITIQUE

Postcolonial feminist theory is overburdened with abstractions. It has been criticized for not paying adequate attention to concrete issues and the concerns of activists. However, there are currently increasing number feminist writings which do focus consistently on the 'particularities and political positions' within the postcolonial context. Western campaigns against victimization of indigenous women through a unitary focus on symbols of oppression such as the forcible implementation of 'sati' and 'veiling' have come under question in postcolonial feminist theory. The same symbolisms are shown to have been sometimes used as a way of resistance to colonialism and oppression. Postcolonial feminist theory shows that issues and struggles are relative and contextual and need to be looked at within specific historical and cultural frameworks. For instance, the freedom of reproductive rights (the choice to carry through a pregnancy or the right to have an abortion) has been a key issue in western women's struggle. Forced contraception, however, becomes a

major issue in Black women's struggle. The issue of human rights becomes more central to indigenous women's movements. The instance of Algerian women 'veiled, unveiled and revealed' has the bewildering effect of questioning oriental binaries. Cultural differences are relentlessly sexualized. Postcolonial feminist theory confronts western feminists with the diversity of indigenous women's lives and experiences and the impossibility of one group of women having any necessary immediate access to other's experiences. The distance between women as groups has to be acknowledged. The main inference is that indigenous women are diverse, and that diversity needs to respected, even as we fight towards certain common goals. Further, western feminist theorists have sidelined the issue of race. Race has a central place in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial feminist theory includes theorizing of race and ethnicity and the analysis of gender issues to account for human variations in terms of culture, tradition, social patterns, and ancestry.

The inertia to face the problem of race by western feminism in called "white guilt". The relative ignorance of the situation of indigenous women is highlighted by postcolonial feminism. Spivak, for instance, has called for white feminists to know more about the rest of the world and to recognize that all third world women are not universally oppressed, held in purdah, uneducated and abused by their husbands and male relatives. Western 398 Feminist Theories feminism held itself as the campaigner for indigenous women. Their interest was in reforming natives, savages and protecting brown women from brown men. But this approach called 'white women's burden' obscures the other violence's of colonial and post-colonial power and distracts attention away from other crucial and pressing issues like human and material development. In conclusion, 'postcolonial studies' at best refers to a body of diverse and contesting writings. It is not a discipline or methodology. The Empires Writes Back aptly demonstrated that it is a creation of literary study. Whether it is viewed as a historical context, as an analytical tool, or as a theory of cultural relations, the validity of the postcolonial lies in its efficacy. How well it has empowered postcolonial intellectuals and enabled the strategy of decolonization is a moot question. Postcoloniality

articulates along with economic, social, cultural and historical factors, in practice it works differently in different parts of the world.

It conveys patriarchy as a relationship of inequality that is highly variable because it is to be considered always with the other social structures. We need caution and qualification when using the term postcolonialism.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Describe the Postcolonial Feminist Theorists.
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2. Postcolonial Feminism: A Critique
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13.6 LET US SUM UP

As you may have noted in your reading of this unit, it is necessary to situate any feminist theory within a particular cultural context. This emphasis is reiterated by Indian feminists as well as all other third world theorists. Chandra Mohanty and Rachel Carby laid the foundational critique against naturalizing all women's oppression without regard to cultural differences. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that politics in one arena can act as colonizing agent in another. Double colonization by both imperial and patriarchal set up is adequately theorized. Kamala Das

writing on the position of Indian woman captures the identity of feminist writers and their relation to male society without reference to race and class. Feminist theories in India can be discerned from many women writers in India through their decoding of gender roles. Feminist critical analysis of institutions and practices point to the systemic and systematic nature of the problem they focus on. Discrimination, exploitation, exclusion, harassment, abuse and violence against women are matters of general concern and public debate. These mistreatments are significantly rooted in particular practices and institutional arrangements imbedded in Indian culture and tradition. Certainly, there is a variety of ongoing changes and their mainstreaming is the major focus. Yet, the powerlessness of women is apparent. In the final analysis, women anywhere are in the structure of power and men rate them inferior, superior or equal as the 399 situations demand (Markandaya, 1954). Our future and its progress depend Postcolonial Feminism on the equality of men and women. It has to be pursued and sustained.

13.7 KEY WORDS

Subaltern: It means a subordinate officer of lower rank. Any submissive subject without power of his/her own is addressed as a subaltern. The marginalized are the subalterns.

Colonialism: It refers to the policy of having colonies to keep them dependent. It implies domination over its subjects. As a theoretical concept, it implies domination and oppression.

Post colonialism: The lasting impact of colonialism even after independence from imperial powers is called post colonialism. It is a broad concept covering individual, geographic, historical and cultural specifications. In this unit, post colonialism specifically refers to issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural differences and the power relations within the postcolonial /liberated people.

Orientalism: Orientalism (oriental studies) refers to western scholarship in eastern languages and its cultures across disciplines. Knowledge means power. According to Edward Said Orientalism denotes a western style of domination.

Third World: The terms North and South are used to emphasize the contrast between the developed and developing countries. Third word is coterminous with developing countries - Africa, Asia and Latin America. Third world also symbolizes the historical and cultural suppression of those countries. Double

Colonization: It refers to two forms of domination simultaneously like imperialsm/colonialism and patriarchy/ oppression. It concerns the marginalized within the suppressed groups.

Multiculturalism: Many distinct cultural groups coexist within one society without prejudice or discrimination.

13.8 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What do you understand by the term ‘postcolonialism’, both in a historical context, and as a discourse? What is ‘postcolonial feminism’?
2. How are its goals similar to those of postcolonial theorists? Try to explain in your own words with the help of examples.
3. Describe the Postcolonial Feminist Theorists.
4. Postcolonial Feminism: A Critique.
5. Discuss the Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Feminism.
6. What are the Characteristics of Postcolonial Feminism?

13.9 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

- Aschroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (1989). The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Liberation. London & New York: Routledge.
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- Bhabha, H. (1991). ‘The Third Space’. In J. Rutherford (Ed.), Identity of Community, Culture, Difference. London: Routledge.
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- Beal, Frances (1970). Sisterhood is Powerful. New York: Random House Publishing.
- Carby, Hazel (1982). 'White Women Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood'. In The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in Seventies Britain. Hutchinson.
- Davis, Natalie, Zemon (2003). 'Iroquois Women, European Women'. In Reina
- Lewis and Sara Mills (Eds). Feminist Postcolonial theory: A Reader. London: Edinburg University.

13.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 13.2
2. See Section 13.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 13.4
2. See Section 13.5

UNIT 14: POSTMODERN ETHICS

STRUCTURE

14.0Objectives

14.1Introduction

14.2The Challenge of Situation Ethics

14.3Cultural and Ethical Subjectivism

14.4Morris Ginsberg's "On the Diversity of Morals"

14.5Let us sum up

14.6Key Words

14.7Questions for Review

14.8Suggested readings and references

14.9Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

While spelling out the importance of ethics in so far as it affects human conduct and behaviour in the society, this unit seeks to respond to the some of the important challenges to ethics as a philosophical discipline particularly from certain approaches to make ethics itself relative. Thus we attempt to look at some of the figures in the tradition of Western Philosophy like Fletcher and Ginsberg, figures representing these challenging currents of thought and we offer an in-depth evaluation of their positions.

- The Challenge of Situation Ethics
- Cultural and Ethical Subjectivism
- Morris Ginsberg's "On the Diversity of Morals"

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the philosophical treatise which studies human behaviour and tries to determine what is right or wrong behaviour. It is also called moral philosophy. (from the Greek 'ethos' and the Latin 'mores' which mean 'custom', 'ways of behaviour', 'human character').That there is in man a spontaneous awareness of a distinction between 'right' and

'wrong' behaviour is an indubitable fact. But philosophy, here like elsewhere, cannot content itself with simply registering facts, it tries to reflect on the 'meaningfulness' of such facts, establish them (or reject them) on a rational basis, understand their implications, draw their practical consequences and above all intuit their ultimate cause (if any). Our study of ethics is also conditioned by some philosophical assumptions, which we take to be philosophically established in other treatises. Perhaps the three principal ones are: the possibility of meta-empirical knowledge, the ontological structure of reality and man as a rational and free being (philosophically established in critical, ontology and psychology respectively). For us, therefore, ethics is an attempt not only to 'understand' what is and what is not right human behaviour, the empirical and meta-empirical 'ground', if any, of the distinction between right and wrong behaviour, but also to see whether the conclusions thus drawn can serve as objective norms for practical conduct. The importance of ethics is obvious. From as far back in history as we can tell, man has always sought to know how to lead a 'good' life and to draw up rules of conduct. Thinkers of all cultures tried to explain in what this 'good' life consisted and, especially, why precisely it was 'good'. It is not so much that traditional moral values are questioned (e.g. the 'just' war, inviolability of life in cases of the hopelessly suffering and of unwanted pregnancies, sexual intercourse only between the legally married, indissolubility of marriage, etc.), but, more radically still, that the very 'meaningfulness' of an unchanging and universally valid morality is brought into question.

The causes of this modern questioning are hard to pin down. Certainly the spread of education, advances in science and technology, problems arising from modern way of living like the everincreasing urbanization, easier communication media, faster means of travel whereby people of one culture come in closer contact with people of another culture, etc are some of the causes. But if, as we have already implied, moral thinking is intimately linked with philosophical thinking in general, it might very well be that these causes, whatever they might be, are to be sought for on a deeper human level. Human person, perhaps, is not so much asking

about the morality of this or that human act, but, more deeply still, about himself: the meaning of his life, the direction of human history, the significance of the human world he lives in, the ambit of his knowledge and the possibility of his ever getting an answer to the questions he asks. Ethics, of course, cannot dream of suggesting answers to such radical questions. But it might well prove to be a 'way of approach' to questions which lie beyond its own field of enquiry.

The reading for this section is the Blackwell Companion, Chapter 14 by Barry Smart, with additional references listed in the references at the end of these notes. In particular, the two books by Kellner and Best provide a good survey and introduction to postmodern perspectives. As with any other approach to social theory, there are a variety of writers associated with the postmodern perspective. As with structuralism, most of these are French, although some are North American. The postmodern perspective spans many disciplines – literature, linguistics, politics, architecture, and artistic fields such as music, visual art, film, and theatre – as well as philosophy, sociology, and even science. Regardless of how one views postmodernism, there is no doubt that it has affected a wide range of theoretical and applied parts of the social sciences. Whether or not one agrees with these postmodern perspectives, many aspects of their analysis appear to be sociologically useful and their critique of contemporary society and social theory must be integrated into social theory – whether by accommodation or critique.

Some of the major postmodernists are Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio, all French writers and theorists. North Americans are the American writers Richard Rorty and Frederic Jameson and the Canadian political theorist Arthur Kroker. Among the more understandable analyses are those by the United States writers David Harvey (a geographer), Douglas Keller, Stephen Best, and Charles Lemert. We will deal with only a few of these and a few of the ideas associated with postmodern perspectives.

A short summary of a few of the ideas of postmodernism is provided in this section. Smart notes that social theory is a part of modernity. We noted this at the beginning of the semester, that it was the separation of society from nature that led to the social theories that analyzed this process. The social theorists from the Enlightenment to the structuralists were generally committed to the idea that the modern represented progress, that reason could be used to develop knowledge and understand society, that social theory could be used to improve society, and that knowledge and theory were somewhat universal in nature – able to contribute to an understanding of societies across history and around the globe. Many of these theorists were also critical of this same modernity, but even the critical theorists were strongly committed to the idea of progress, even if they considered it difficult or impossible to achieve it.

In contrast, postmodern writers argue that there are "limits and limitations of modern reason" (p. 397) that are inherent in the forms and types of reasoning and social analysis that has characterized society and the modern. Further, these writers question whether this form of reason and rationality can be equated with "progress in respect of 'justive, virtue, equality, freedom, and happiness'" (p. 397). As a result "the practical consequences of modernity seem to have been persistently at odds with its programmatic promise" (p. 498). The problems of the contemporary social world, the rapid change, and the new forms of media and culture are all reference points for the postmodern critique and analysis.

Identity. In postmodern approaches, individual (or even group) identity is not clearly and unambiguously defined, rather it shifts over time and is generally considered unstable. In addition, it is primarily local circumstances and experiences of individuals, rather than larger structural conditions or positions and locations, that are important in shaping these identities. This means that social classes, ethnic groups, or status groups may not exist in the manner described in social theory, and analysis of these does not provide a useful way of understanding the contemporary social world. That is, the shared circumstances or common

situations of class, race, or ethnicity may not exist, and may be purely a theoretical construct that theorists attempt to impose of the social world. Shared and common identities give way to shifting and localized identities that may or may not be shaped by the individual. These identities are continually being formed, changed, and particular individuals shift in and out of these experiences and situations, thus changing their identities.

Politics. The political implication of this is that it may be difficult to imagine collective action, social movements, and social change toward some specific goal. For extreme postmodernists, there may be no goals or plans that people can or should attempt to strive for or achieve. Some postmodernists argue that identities and localized situations are all that we should be concerned with; others argue that political action can still be a useful means of improving society. Some may not take a particular point of view on important social questions, arguing that all identities, statements, and texts are equally valid, and while these can be interpreted or read, no judgments on the validity or invalidity of these is possible or desirable.

Differences. A feature that is common among postmodernists is to reject grand theoretical approaches or "metanarratives" entirely. Rather than searching for a theoretical approach that explains all aspects of society, postmodernism is more concerned with examining the variety of experiences of individuals and groups and it emphasizes differences over similarities and common experiences. In the view of many postmodernists, the modern world is "fragmented, disrupted, disordered, interrupted" and unstable – and may not be understandable on a large scale (Rosenau, p. 170). A large part of this approach is to critique the grand theoretical approaches and "deconstruct texts" (Ritzer, pp. 632-636). This requires the reader to interpret texts, but not impose on others the reader's interpretation of texts (Rosenau, p. 170).

Reflexive? Smart (p. 421-2) argues that modern theory was very reflexive – composed of reflection, thought, and consideration of the

world around us, with a view to understanding and changing the social world. Further, such reflection "includes reflection upon the nature of reflection itself" (Giddens, in Smart, p. 422) – consideration of the nature of social thought through subjects such as philosophy and the applied social science. In the modern view, this created the possibility of knowledge or even truth, constructed through reflection, with this knowledge describing the social world around us. This has led some theorists to the view that they have models that represent the natural and social world.

What Smart notes on p. 422 is that it is increasingly difficult to understand what are representations or social knowledge and what are the contexts or social realities. This can occur for a number of different reasons.

First, as Smart's discussion of Giddens notes, social knowledge is used to construct social reality – e.g. attitudes (social reality?) are formed through public discourse, which is guided by various theoretical and practical aspects that are developed through social knowledge. Or the more tangible aspects of social reality such as urban structures, tax policy and its effects on income inequality, or media images and constructions are all products of social or economic policy or conscious intervention by those who attempt to influence social organization, and these are in turn guided by social knowledge. The latter is developed by studies of the seemingly real, but where the real is a social product, where does knowledge end and social reality begin? Perhaps the two are so intertwiend that they cannot be separated.

A second interpretation is that of Baudrillard, whereby it becomes difficult to separate the social reality from its representations. Disneyworld or the new Las Vegas may be representations or what Baudrillard calls simulacra (an image – a material or mental representation of a person or thing; something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities. OED) but since more are familiar with the representations than

with the originals, and since these representations become part of the experiences and knowledge of people, which is the social reality and which is the representation? Similarly, media images become the social reality, and social reality is constructed with the media images in mind.

A third example comes from recordings of music. Originally it was clear what was the original and what was the copy. The musicians made music and it was recorded on a cylinder, record, tape, or compact disk. As new methods of manipulating the recordings developed, and as electronic sources of sounds developed, it became common to splice, mix, sample, overlay, and generally reorganize the original sounds. This developed to the point where the recorded sound sometimes became the reality, with the record or compact disk being the song or piece of music. These recordings were widely available, so what began as the representation became the original or the reality. This led to bizarre developments such as lip-synching in live performances or audiences judging live performances by how well they repeated the recorded songs and order of selections. In some cases, there was no reality apart from the recording – it would be impossible for live performances to reproduce the recording. Finally, with digital technology, it is now possible that what is real may be pure image – that is, a composer of a piece of music could write out a string of 0s and 1s of computer code (the real as image), and the representation (formerly the real) is the sound waves that are produced and heard by the human ear when these computer codes are processed through the proper equipment.

As a result of the above considerations, the distinction between knowledge, representation, and social reality becomes blurred. Smart notes that reflection itself becomes uncertain in these circumstances and this leads "to the problematic character of Western metaphysics" or philosophy, so that some argue that "we are encountering its closure or end; an understanding which is experienced, or lived, as contingency" (p. 422).

Postmodernity and Postmodernism. Postmodernism sometimes refers to the characteristics of contemporary society, and at other times to a theoretical approach that is a critique of the classical or modernist approaches. In order to distinguish these two, the former is often referred to as postmodernity and the latter as postmodernism. That is, the current period can be referred to as the period of postmodernity, with the social theorical analysis of this period being referred to as postmodernism. The next section of the notes examines some of the origins of postmodernism, followed by a description of the postmodern period.

14.2 THE CHALLENGE OF SITUATION ETHICS

Situation ethics is the kind of approach to morality we might expect from an existentialist, who tends to reject the very idea of human nature – or any nature or "essence", for that matter. Joseph Fletcher, the former dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Cincinnati and professor of Social Ethics, Episcopal Theology School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, published his classical Situation Ethics in 1961. At the onset, he presents his view as the golden mean between the two reprehensible extremes of legalism and antinomianism. Unlike the latter, he assures us, "The situationist enters into every decision-making situation armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage." There is no question of throwing out all laws, rules and commandments. However, he "treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems" but is prepared to "compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so". Now that last phrase serves to characterize what makes Fletcher describe as "Christian" his whole approach to morality. Fletcher even takes a swipe at "Kant's legalism," which produced universal laws like "a lie is always wrong'. He asks, "But what if you have to tell a lie to keep a promised secret?" and answers, "May be you lie and, if so, good for you if you follow love's lead." When we adopt a critical approach, we cannot but record our dissatisfaction as regards the carelessness with which Fletcher defines his position. If Aristotle and anyone who hold some sort of "natural law" morality are to be counted

among the situationists, that grouping has been emptied of almost all precise meaning. The only ones excluded from that nomenclature would be the extreme legalist and antinomians, and would they be so numerous and so influential to warrant the setting up of whole "new morality"? Just about any system of deontological ethics that is open to prudence and casuistry is already sufficient to respond to the difficulty. And when Fletcher pens something to the effect that, "Situation ethics goes part of the way with natural law, accepting reason as the instrument of judgment, while rejecting the notion that the good is 'given in the nature of things, objectively," one cannot help wondering whether he had really understood natural law and objective morality properly, at all. Fletcher has, to say the least, a rather legalistic definition of love. So long as an act is done "selflessly" without the agent seeking any clearly manifest material gain, it is a moral act. Even the sickest of mentally deranged acts could also be roped in as ethically laudable if they were 3 done without any demonstrably material profit being sought in the process. But if love is selflessness, before we can assess its rightness or wrongness, shouldn't we first enquire into the nature of the self? Besides, as one might well ask, why should love be the norm of morality and not hate? Ultimately one can only answer that question by saying that love enhances one's personhood, one's "human nature adequately considered." It makes one more fully human, more fully alive. And hate does not do that. This obliges us to recognize a more basic and deeper norm 'love in itself.' To give Fletcher his due, one has to admit that he does give the impression that he has done some critical reflection on love and its authentic meaning, even if it wouldn't stand up to anything like a deeper metaphysical query. He trots out some fancy terminology from Tillich to this end: Using terms made popular by Tillich and others, we may say that situationalism is a method that proceeds, so to speak, from

(1) its one and only law, agape (love), to
(2) the sophia (wisdom), containing many "general rules" of more or less reliability, to

(3) the kairos (moment of decision, the fullness of time) in which the responsible self in the situation decides whether the sophia can serve there or not.

Whence he goes on to make a highly simplistic summary of how the rival ethicists proceed: “Legalists make an idol of sophia, antinomians repudiate it, and situationists use it.” Finally, Fletcher, taking his cue from Socrates to the effect that the unexamined life is not worth living, suggests that “unexamined ethical maxims are not worth living by.” and then he unleashes a salvo on the maxim that “The end does not justify the means.” On the contrary, he asks, “If the end does not justify the means, what does?” And he answers, “Obviously, ‘Nothing.’” Whence his another proposition of situation ethics, “Only the end justifies the means; nothing else.” In the light of the preceding, this boils down to say that anything done out of love (the means) is thereby justified or made morally good. He is careful to quickly add, “Not any old end will justify any old means” only love would do the job. And then he tops it off with another chilling remark, “Being pragmatic, the situationist always asks the price and supposes that in theory and practice everything has its price. Everything, please note. Even for a ‘pearl of great price’ whatever it is – might be sold for love’s sake if the situation calls for it.” This kind of remark is chilling because it can be used to justify the suicide bomber who blows himself up with a host of innocent civilians – and, as we have seen, Fletcher actually does that. Even if we don’t fully endorse Fletcher and his brand of situation ethics, is there something we can learn from what he has tried to tell us? He is reminding us of a timeless and oft-forgotten maxim: unless an action, however good in itself, is done with the motive of sincere love, it has no real ethical value, whatsoever.

The philosophic origins of the postmodern approach are usually traced to Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Best and Kellner (1991, p. 22) argue that Nietzsche "attacked philosophical conceptions of the subject, representation, causality, truth, value, and system, replacing … [them] with a perspectivist orientation for which there are no facts, only interpretations, and no objective truths, only the constructs of various

individuals or groups." For Nietzsche "all language was metaphorical and … the subject was only a product of language and thought" (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 22). Nietzsche favoured art over reason and theory. Forerunners of postmodern perspectives also include Weber, Simmel, and some critical theorists.

Many of the French writers who developed the postmodern perspectives in the 1960s through the 1980s began writing when the structuralist approach was influential. Within, or as a result of societal structures, individual identities are determined, or at least strongly affected, by economic factors, or by political and ideological forces. The norms, collective representations, social class, ideology, or social status position and determine individual consciousness and action. In this approach, these structures are internalized by individuals, affect how these individuals think, play a major role in how individuals act and interact and tend to be relatively fixed and unchangeable over time.

The poststructuralist writers who began to develop a new approach "attacked the scientific pretensions of structuralism" amd argued "that structuralist theories did not fully break with humanism since they reproduced the humanist notion of an unchanging human nature." Instead of seeing structures as determinant, they looked on consciousness, identity, signs "as historically produced and therefore varying in different historical periods." Both structuralists and poststructuralists argued that there is no autonomous subject, but the poststructuralists emphasized the "dimensions of history, politics, and everyday life in the contemporary world." (Paragraph and quotes from Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 20).

These writers emphasized and developed new theories of language and texts and attacked many philosophical assumptions associated with modernity. They questioned whether solid forms of knowledge and truth could be developed and attacked the binary oppositions (subject and object, appearance and reality, knowledge and social reality) that formed the basis for dominant philosophical and social scientific thought. "This binary metaphysics thus works to positively position reality over

appearance, speech over writing, men over women, or reason over nature, thus positioning negatively the supposedly inferior term" (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 21).
The political upheavals in France in 1968 contributed to the success of these ideas. Best and Kellner (1991, p. 23) note that "it was through such struggles as waged by students and workers the Foucault and others began to theorize the intimate connection between power and knowledge and to see that power operates … [to] saturate social and personal existence" (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 23).

From these beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s, postmodernists continued their attack on conventional philosophic and social scientifice approaches, developing a wide range of views that challenged the notion of progress, truth, reality, and values. Among the writers who are often classified as postmodernist are Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Roland Barthes, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Felix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze, Paul Virilio, and Arthur Kroker. Part of the appeal of postmodern approaches is that they attempt to break down barriers among disciplines, times, and traditions and attempt to analyze each of these. This can lead to valuable interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approaches. At the same time, these approaches question the notion of human progress and constitute a thoroughgoing attack on the legacy of the Enlightenment, on positive sociology, historical progress, science and the scientific method and political struggles and social movements.

The postmodern approach originally came from the humanities where "subjectivity and speculation" (Rosenau, p. 168) are interesting and insightful. The postmodern approach may consider all forms of culture to be of equal validity, and this can sometimes be a useful corrective to the exclusivity and elevation of certain types of culture. On the other hand, it can lead to trivializing culture and making it difficult to make positive statements about cultural developments. For the social sciences, the applications may be more limited.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Ethics and its importance.

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2) Illustrate Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics.

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14.3 CULTURAL AND ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

There is a quite understandable objection that any kind of ethical system based on human nature (however adequately considered.) has to face and that stems from the undeniable fact of cultural relativism. In one culture polygamy is viewed as right and moral; in another it is roundly condemned; not too long ago certain tribes in the South Sea Islands considered the painless killing off of ones parents a filial duty, most of us would be horrified at the very idea. Sometimes within the same country or culture, there are splits: Some Indians disapprove of the remarriage of widows, others have no problem with it; People across the globe are radically divided on the morality of birth control and divorce. Now, if

there were some kind of common human nature upon which all moral laws are based, how do we explain these wide divergences – even contradictions? Furthermore, studies in anthropology and sociology have led us to accept cultural relativism: there is no one culture which can be seen as superior to others, we are told. Each culture makes sense, is sufficient unto it-self within its own religious and philosophical presuppositions. It would be grossly unfair for one culture to arrogate to it-self the right to stand on judgment on another one. And even if one were to claim that he/she is not critiquing an alien culture from his/her cultural standpoint, but from the fancied "neutral ground" of "common human nature", isn't that, to say the least, rather naive? For he/she would be, in effect, advocating an understanding of human nature mediated by the "pre-understanding of his/her own culture, however subjectively convinced he/she may be that strict detachment is being observed. And, in any case, in the practical order of things, it would end up by the economically and politically dominant culture foisting itself upon all weaker ones, obliterating all "native" or "local " cultures and "little traditions" in one vast process of cultural domination? In fact, isn't this what "globalization" amounts to and haven't we all been most vocal in finding fault with it? Let us begin our response to these very pertinent questions with one important introductory remark. Many of the people who are up in arms at any mention of a common natural law confuse it with the rigid formalism of the Kantian "categorical imperative." Nothing could be more wrong. The categorical imperative of Kantian morality could not but enjoin strict and absolute submission, without any possibility of the least exception. To make matters worse, they had to be motivated by a purely internal drive – not out of love for anyone or anything external to the agent, not even love of one's country, God, family or friends: it had to be nothing but "duty for duty's sake". All this is enough to make any self-respecting antinomian see red, to say the least. Kant was determined that his system of ethics have an autonomous source. Basing mortal conduct on external grounds – the will, of God (Occam) or of positive law (Durkheim) would be to ask for trouble. An atheist would be deprived of any moral foundation and positive law would scarcely help matters: it is susceptible to so many variants, often

on the basis of vested interests 5 and corruption, that it would afford, at best, a very shaky moral set-up. On the other hand, Kant's agnostic epistemology, influenced by Hume, rendered it quite impossible to take the "natural law," based on human nature, as the norm of morality.

As the first Critique had argued, we cannot know the 'thing-in-itself' (the noumenon) and human nature is one of those things, precisely. The only solution was for him to ground it among those a prior practical principle built into our very mental makeup, parallel to those speculative principles that The Critique of pure Reason has uncovered. These a priori synthetic judgments were endowed with the qualities of strict universality and absolute necessity. One could as much expect exceptions to moral laws as one could require, say, the Principle of Identity or Contradiction to allow for contravention on the basis of special circumstances. But, if one were not to go along with Hume and Kant and accept that not only is there a common human nature in which we all participate, but can discern what basically constitutes it, the problem is dispersed at once. In the first place, this doesn't open the door to all manner of cultural exploitation and foisting questionable pre-understandings and perceptions onto recalcitrant people and their cultures. The basic make-up of all humans or "common human nature" would comprise the following data: we are embodied beings with a capacity to transcend space and time, are social by nature, rooted in a world and have some sort of relatedness to the ultimate: only that and nothing more. No host of uncritical "commonness" are being smuggled in as a kind of packaged deal, forcing people to accept certain attitudes to people, places, things and even God as constituting our "common human nature". Furthermore, sense perception is a necessary constituent of human nature and this, in itself, opens the door to certain relativism – perceptual relativism. Now this opens the door to a whole range of divergences within and between cultures. For if all people are seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting the same objects, they are not necessarily apprehending them in the same way. There is the possibility of "acquitted tastes" and some people acquire them, while others don't. Accepting a common human nature does not oblige us to subscribe to a

single, common view of things, as rigid and unchanging as the Kantian categorical imperatives. Inasmuch as much of culture is built on sense perception there is plenty of scope for a certain cultural relativism. However, not all cultural differences can be reduced to the mere relativeness of our perception of things. Sometimes it stems from a broader and wider interpretation of whole complexes of interrelated experiences. A particular local, regional or even national customs or rite may imply a judgment that people of a particular gender, ethnic or religious background are either nonpersons' or rather inferior version of the species. As a result, they are disqualified from enjoying certain privileges and rights that another dominant group claims exclusively for it. In cases, such as these, where a clear ethical bias is manifest, one has every right to challenge and critique the culture concerned. Cultural divergences, based on a questionable hermeneutics and implying arrant discrimination against certain people cannot justify itself on the grounds of cultural difference.

14.4 MORRIS GINSBERG'S "ON THE DIVERSITY OF MORALS"

Professor of Sociology at the University of London from 1929-1954, just one year before his retirement, Ginsberg delivered the Huxley Memorial lecture on the phenomenon of apparent ethical relativism that anthropologists and sociologists were unearthing in cross cultural studies. 6 It would be pertinent to quote in anticipation, the conclusion he arrives at, after a long and patient scrutiny of the facts. Amidst variations moral codes everywhere exhibit striking similarities in essentials. There are no societies without rules of conduct, backed by the general approval of the members. There are none which do not regard that which contributes to the needs and survival of the group as good, none which do not condemn conduct interfering with the satisfaction of common needs and threatening the stability of social relations. As Ginsberg sums it up insightfully, "It might be argued that the diversity of moral judgments affords no more proof of their subjectivity than the diversity of judgments regarding matters of fact throws any doubt on the possibility of valid scientific judgments about them" He then goes on to

detail six different contexts wherein a certain variation in moral practices may be noted between and within certain nations and cultures. In sum, they are as follows: (1) Variations in the view as to whom moral rules were held to be applicable. (2) Variations arising due to differences of opinion as to the non-moral qualities of certain acts and their consequences. (3) Variations arising from the fact that the same act appears to be seen differently in different situations and contexts. (4) Variations arising due to a difference of emphasis on different elements comprising moral life. (5) Variations arising from the possibility of alternative ways of satisfying primary needs. (6) Variations due to differences of moral insight and general level of development, ethical as well as intellectual. The range of persons to whom moral rules are held to be applicable: Anthropologists like Taylor recognize a certain "natural solidarity," comprising a measure of mutual forbearance, helpfulness and trust as constitutive of all societies. Everyone felt somehow bound to his or her neighbour by certain societal bonds of shared care and responsibility. However, there was a divergence of view as to who really were ones neighbours. Initially, and quite understandably, "neighbour" was rather narrowly understood to be only those of one's own family, tribe or clan and very often it was only the males who, in the full sense, were considered moral persons to whom societal norms in all fullness had to be applied. However, what constitutes one's "neighbourness" is not a particular set of racial features or one's sex but "human nature adequately considered" and so moral laws have to be applied to all persons, irrespective of their age, sex, social status or nationality. No law was understood as discriminating against ones neighbour: there was only a mistaken perception as to what the term meant. It could well be that vested interest's made use of this confusion to justify their breaking of promises and agreements to colonised natives. After all, if the natives had no souls, then they were mere sub-humans and the ethical prescriptions didn't apply in their case. Differences arising from the growth of knowledge concerning certain acts: This is perhaps best exemplified with the medical discovery, in fairly recent times, of the role played by microbes in generating disease. This has given us new responsibilities as regards cleanliness and hygiene: hospital staff may be

guilty of criminal neglect if they are careless in these areas nowadays something totally unheard of in ancient period. Again, it was only in the eighteenth century that people desisted from torturing and burning to death alleged "witches." At that time, such people were seen as being guilty of heinous crimes and, due to their pernicious influence or occult powers could cause serious bodily harm to peoples, bring about natural disasters and jeopardize not only their own salvation, but of others as well. As Lecky, remarks "granted these propositions, there was no moral difficulty in drawing the conclusion that… [They]…should be 7 put to death." Happily, we live in more enlightened times and developments in psychology and sociology have helped us recognize the folly and error underlying such views. The same act is seen differently in different contexts/cultures: Divergences, here, are very often the result of ethical laws and principles being couched in a very brief formula. As a result, the passage of time or a wholly new set of circumstances in a different climate or culture yield examples of "differences" in ethical behavior as regards the "same" act when, on closer study, we realize that these are totally different ones altogether. What constitutes "usury" in one place may not be so in another, depending on the standard of living. A simplistic condemnation of "aggression" may only apparently be broken in the case of a pre-emptive strike where one nation attacks another because it has reasonable grounds to believe that the other is planning a full scale invasion. In a society where there is no established system of properly conducted law courts, self-redress may be a legitimate option, whereas it would be condemnable wherever there is a working network of judiciary procedures. Variations due to differences of emphases in moral responsibility: Even if there is a universal agreement that we should do what is right and spurn all that is evil, there may be differences of view as to what is the ultimate reason we should do so: it may mean, as Ginsberg summarizes it, "Because it is the will of God and that will may be considered inscrutable; or it may mean because of the love of God, or because of the love of men, not so much because they are worthy of it, but because they are the objects of divine love and enabled by the Incarnation; or again for prudential reasons because it would lead to beatitude in this or another world." Sometimes, a particular stress may

lead to a certain imbalance if there is no critical reflection accompanying the trend. Irrational feelings of love and devotion may land one in the extremes of fanaticism. An over-stress on faith may lead to a neglect of justice. Self-discipline may wind up in repulsive forms of masochism. It is not so much ethical relativism that is to be blamed for all these oddities, but a lack of the cultivation of a spirit of self-criticism and recta ratio. Variations due to different ways of fulfilling basic needs: This arises when people, though they may be in agreement as to what constitutes the most basic needs of humans ("first order values"), different societies and cultures seek to fulfill them by alternative ways ("second order values"). For instance, most communities favour the monogamous marriage and the sex-rules associated with it: the association of sex with enduring companionship, the fusing of sex with tenderness, the enhancement of the parental relationship through shared interest in the upbringing and love of children, providing security to children by the experience of parent's love for them and for each other and so on. These are all "first order values" and all cultures recognize these. However, they may seek different ways to realize these ways other than monogamous marriage and its customary practices. Thus, in Bantu society (in Africa), physical attraction, affection and companionship usually follow quite different channels. Instead of seeking these within the context of monogamy, "quite different channels" are followed for each of the above-mentioned "second order values", "a man desiring his wife, loving his sister and seeking companionship among his male relatives and friends." This is where there is ample scope for dialogue and exchange, where people of different cultures can challenge each other's' presuppositions and customs, seeking how to more fully and deeply realize the basic goals ("first order values") that they all respect. In our more enlightened times of freedom of enquiry and dialogue, when we have come to realize that no culture is perfect and infallible and that we have a lot to learn even 8 from those we don't quite agree with, such exchanges can prove beneficial to all the parties concerned and no one will come away from serious and sincere sharing with quite the same convictions and presuppositions with which he or she entered into it. Divergences due to the particular level of mental development: The

development of mental, and therefore, moral acumen may be gauged, Ginsberg says, from five perspectives: (a) The degree of universalism that a moral system envisages: this is a matter of assessing whether the moral code stops with the confines of the family, tribe or clan or whether it goes on to include rules governing how one should deal with the larger family, embracing people of all nations, ethnic groups, cultures and religions and making no discrimination according to sex, age or religion; (b) The range or comprehensiveness of experience embodied in the particular moral code: obviously the moral code of a small group that takes out a kind of nomadic existence by hunting and gathering will be very sensitive to issues linked with rather limited way of life, but it will be lacking as to guidelines for business, economic and inter religious relationships; (c) The extent to which the underlying moral codes and principles that are the basis of any moral system are brought to light and scrutinized as to how justified they are and whether they have been made to fit together coherently and harmoniously; (d) The extent to which there is a separation of moral codes from law and from religion: this is important because if no clear demarcation is made, the principles of the dominant religion will be taken as the basis of law and morality and this will imply scant respect, if any, for people who don't subscribe to the doctrines of the dominant religion: obviously, there should be left scope for individual decision in certain matters and the law should not employ its machinery to oblige everyone to act as if he or she was not in full accord with the teachings of a given religion; (e) The extent to which moral systems permit, even encourage, self-criticism and self-direction: a system which assumes that even adults are too immature to make their own religious and moral decisions and refuse to tolerate even the mildest form of dissent, even when presented non-violently is certainly inferior to one that assures for a public debate on complex issues and in the light of contemporary development in the social sciences.

Postmodern Era

In Europe, the premodern period generally refers to the period through the end of the middle ages, with the modern period beginning with the development of capitalist industrialism and the Enlightenment. In the

contemporary world, some developing nations are only now emerging from the premodern period and attempting to modernize, at the same time that the richer countries are entering a postmodern phase. As a result, a strict time dimension with a progression from one stage to the next may not be a proper way of imaging history, and postmodern approaches themselves would argue against such an interpretation. That is, premodernity and postmodernity could coexist – for example, with television and contemporary musical forms introduced into poor, indigenous groups in parts of the third world. Further, within modernity there are many examples of postmodern ideas – Nietzsche, Weber, Simmel, Adorno (see Smart, p. 397) – and if we are in a postmodern era, there are many traces of the modern. Some, like Lyotard argue that the postmodern is part of the modern (p. 397) and the postmodern is not necessarily sequential after the modern.

The modern period is characterized by the development of science, human progress, the development and expansion of industry, improvements in conditions of life and health, urbanization, continued improvements (?) in technology, the establishment of the nation state, liberal forms of democracy, bureaucracy, and social reforms – all of these stand out as accomplishments of modern forms of social, economic and political organization. In terms of modernist theories, liberalism, rationality, individualism, science, classic and more recent sociological theories, egalitarianism and tolerance, humanism, socialism, and communism all stand out as major perspectives that lead to a method of understanding, interpreting and improving society.

Postmodern theorists question how much the above have occurred, or they argue that the nature of the social world and the manner in which development is taking place has changed. Some writers have argued that we are in a postindustrial world. Industrialization has been so successful that the problems of production have all been solved and agriculture and industry are now capable of producing as much or more than humans will ever need Such a society shifts its emphasis away from the production of goods to the production of services, and away from dull,

repetitive, manual labour to mental labour. For writers such as Daniel Bell, associated with this is a shift in the nature of work, with more meaningful and creative jobs, and perhaps the end of the division of labour into mental and manual tasks. Accompanying this have been new forms of technology: automated production, robots, and computerization. In addition, there may be new forms of organization of the economy, with scientific management, cooperation between labour and management and "people's capitalism" through widespread ownership of corporate stock. In her latest book, Judy Rebick even argues that pension funds could point the way toward democratization of the economic world, an argument usually associated with apologists for capitalism. The proponents of such developments may argue that class structures are irrelevant, that there is no conflict between capital and labour and that by adapting to these new global developments, we will be better off.

The last few years have seen an emphasis on computerization, information technologies, virtual reality and new forms of extremely rapid and extensive communication. The latter create more flexible forms of production, instant communication around the world, a greater degree of globalization of the economy, and more rapid change. Other features to be noted are the effects of these features in parts of the world that were regarded as third world – skipping over the modern period, uneven development in different areas of the world (stagnation or backward movement in Africa and parts of Eastern Europe and rapid industrialization in some Asian countries), population movements, and new forms of identity politics. In North America and Europe, the structures of populations have changed, with more immigrants who are visible minorities, leading to changes in structures of culture, politics, and population.

The end of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe also means that there is no counter to capitalism, as there was for most of the century. Some characterize the current era as one with a global economic system that adopts much the same approach everywhere. This is taken by

postmodernists as an indication that the nature of the world has changed dramatically.

At the same time there are those who consider these recent developments are not really new, but just different forms that have become apparent in late capitalism. For these analysts, the same forms of social and class structure and class struggle that characterized early and modern capitalism still exist or are even exacerbated by these new developments. In this view, work has become more contingent and less meaningful, uncertainty about the future has become greater and the division between the haves and the have-nots has widened on a national and international scale. Others note the increasingly serious environmental problems created by modernism, with global sustainability and even the existence of human life being threatened.

Regardless of which approach is taken, it is clear that new forms of technology and communication have increasingly affected the contemporary social world, that the forces of globalization have changed, that the quality and certainties of life have are being threatened and that the pace of change has quickened. Whether these changes call for a new set of theories is also debated. Those who are adherents of the theories that can be traced back to the Enlightenment may argue that these theories need revision, but that the models developed earlier are still applicable.

Postmodern theorists argue that to understand the nature of these developments, it is necessary to critique and abandon some of the grand theoretical schemes that were developed over the last two hundred years, and develop new modes of thought and understanding. Rosenau notes that:

Modernity entered history as a progressive force promising to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality, but one can readily wonder whether that promise has been sustained. As we in the West approach the end of the twentieth century, the "modern" record – world wars, the rise

of Nazism, concentration camps (in both East and West), genocide, worldwide depression, Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Persian Gulf, and a widening gap between rich and poor ... makes any belief in the idea of progress or faith in the future seem questionable. ... The post-modernists conclude that there is reason to distrust modernity's moral claims, traditional institutions and "deep interpretations." They argue that modernity is no longer a force for liberation; it is rather a source of subjugation, oppression, and repression. (Rosenau, pp. 5-6).

There seems to be little doubt that there are aspects of society that have changed, and some of the new forces of capitalism, technology, and communication are having an effect on politics and society, and affect the lives of people. Whether these constitute a break in the sense that earlier theoretical perspectives are no longer useful in questionable. There seems to be no doubt thought that earlier perspectives need revision, and some of the ideas of postmodern writers should certainly be considered and integrated into sociological analysis.

Postmodern Conditions

Smart discusses postmodern conditions with respect to knowledge and social theory (pp. 404-6). As societies have entered a postmodern or postindustrial era, "the status of knowledge is altered" (p. 404). One aspect of this is the decline of the all-encompassing, universal, enlightenment approaches of liberalism and socialism. These were alternative theories that emerged in the nineteenth century, using rationality and reason and promising human emancipation. While some may argue that neither were given a chance to succeed, in practice neither lived up to its promise. The twentieth century was associated with war, inequality, extremism, division, and environmental degradation. The century ended with confusion, disarray, war and conflict, continuing poverty, the collapse of socialism, and continued crisis in capitalism. The grand narratives of emancipation, progress, and human freedom on which modernity was based turned out to be inadequate, misleading, incapable of explaining society, unable to predict the direction of the

social world, and did not provide a sense of security and freedom. At least that is what some postmodernists argue.

One of the writers who describes this change is Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998, French), born in Versailles. He became professor at Vincennes University, and was active in the movement to stop the French war in Algeria, the May, 1968 events, and other left French political groups. Lyotard's book The Postmodern Condition (1979) provides a critique of modern knowledge, more than modernity as an historical process (BK, 1991, p. 165). For Lyotard, the grand narrative of modern knowledge has lost its credibility, "regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard in Smart, p. 404). He argues that the decline in this narrative has been accelerating since World War II, partly as a result of the shift of "emphasis from the ends of action to its means" (Lyotard in Smart, p. 405), and to problems associated with and inherent in science and modern reason itself. Some of these ideas are reminiscent of critical theory, Weber, and philosophers such as Nietzsche.

For Lyotard, postmodern knowledge is opposed to metanarratives, "grand schemes of legitimation" and "metaphysical philosopy, philosophies of history, and any form of totalizing thought" (BK, 1991, p. 165). As a result, Lyotard would consider liberalism, Marxism, the rational forces of Weber, and structural functional approaches to be inadequate or misleading explanations of the social world, and unable to develop true knowledge of this world. These large scale theories or metanarratives tend to argue that they are universally applicable, with prescriptions for progress regardless of context. Further, these theories tend to exclude, rather than include, favour consensus over dissent, and similarity over diversity and difference. For example, liberalism appears inclusive, but traditionally excluded many parts of society, excluded those not part of the nation state, and adopts a specific view of citizenship that not all may accept. Theories such as those of Durkheim exclude and treat as deviant those who do not adopt the conventional norms. Marxism excludes by focussing on commodities, exchange, and

political activity. Science excludes magic, superstition, revelation, and the spiritual in the name of certain knowledge and understanding.

In contrast, postmodern knowledge "is for heterogeneity, plurality, constant innovation, and pragmatic construction of local rules and prescriptives agreed up by participants, and is thus for micropolitics" (BK, 1991, p. 165). This not only argues for a new form of experience and politics, but for a new form of knowledge – this new form corresponding to the new conditions of the postmodern era. Like many other recent theorists, he emphasizes the diversity and heterogeneity associated with language and discourse – noting new words, slogans, forms, rules, and perspectives within language. These aspects are intimately connected with diversity and what we sometimes call identity (note language of youth, bureaucracy, minority groups). For Lyotard, there are many language games in fields such as politics, philosophy, and art, with no single privileged or universal system. Rather, struggles over justice and fairness are associated with these language games and "one must agree that disagreement, as well as putting in questions and challenging, always be allowed or else there is terror and no justice" (BK, 1991, p. 163). In this, Lyotard demonstrates some similarities to the theory of communicative action of Habermas.

Postmodern knowledge comes by "putting into question existing paradigms, by inventing new ones, rather than assenting to universal truth or in agreeing to a consensus" (BK, 1991, p. 166).

Consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. (Lyotard in BK, 1991, p. 166).

While the focus of Lyotard is on language and knowledge, he argues that these new forms of knowledge emerge in the postindustrial era – the

postmodern society associated with information, comuterization, technology, rapid change, and new cultural forms.

While Lyotard's argument that there is no grand narrative may itself be a grand narrative, he provides an example of how postmodern writers emphasize the decline in such narratives and an emergence of different forms of knowledge. These new forms of knowledge are often associated with formerly excluded groups (women, aboriginal people, gay people, immigrants), from traditions that were lost, forgotten, or ignored, or from new forms of communication and technology themselves. These new forms are often localized, associated with particular experiences, and may not have universal applicability. For example, none of us would want to be without modern science, drugs, and medicine. Yet these have their limits, and may themselves cause problems of their own in some cases or be unable to deal with other situations. In this context, alternative forms of medicine based on forgotten traditions or from other cultures have become more widely used and appear to have made a place even within the established health care system.

14.5 LET US SUM UP

Postmodernism is largely a reaction against the intellectual assumptions and values of the modern period in the history of Western philosophy (roughly, the 17th through the 19th century). Indeed, many of the doctrines characteristically associated with postmodernism can fairly be described as the straightforward denial of general philosophical viewpoints that were taken for granted during the 18th-century Enlightenment, though they were not unique to that period. The most important of these viewpoints are the following.

We have exposed the main challenges to Ethics arising from Situation Ethics, Subjectivism and the divergence of morals. In our conclusion, we would like to emphasise that we should not commit the mistake to the effect that the more technologically developed and industrially refined a culture is, the more enlightened it will be, in the sense of the five norms outlined above by Ginsberg. Nor should we assume that access to the

media and information technology would necessarily create a society made of people who are more critical and less likely to be led astray by unscrupulous demagogues and cleaver dicks who're hell bent on making a fast buck for themselves at whatever cost to other people, the environment and the future generations. Globalization, today, is proceeding along very unethical lines and has been elaborated by a culture that prides itself on being a model for all the world, one whose very pretensions to democracy and family values cloud well be questioned. It is by what Pannikar calls a "diatopical" exchange – a dialogue between cultures – that societies can learn from one another, challenge each other and grow together, without being obliged to model themselves on one allegedly "higher" level of intellectual development. Some cultures may have a lot to offer others from one angle while they need to learn from others as regards another aspect. Paolo Freire, for instance, opined that third world cultures should learn from the technological development of the west but, in their turn, have a lot to offer the latter from the way they have learnt to preserve family values and a less destructive way of relating to nature. In all this, it is human nature adequately considered that is to be repeatedly brought into the area of discussion, sharing and debate whenever we feel decisions and judgments have to be made.

1. There is an objective natural reality, a reality whose existence and properties are logically independent of human beings—of their minds, their societies, their social practices, or their investigative techniques. Postmodernists dismiss this idea as a kind of naive realism. Such reality as there is, according to postmodernists, is a conceptual construct, an artifact of scientific practice and language. This point also applies to the investigation of past events by historians and to the description of social institutions, structures, or practices by social scientists.

2. The descriptive and explanatory statements of scientists and historians can, in principle, be objectively true or false. The postmodern denial of this viewpoint—which follows from the rejection of an objective natural

reality—is sometimes expressed by saying that there is no such thing as Truth.

3. Through the use of reason and logic, and with the more specialized tools provided by science and technology, human beings are likely to change themselves and their societies for the better. It is reasonable to expect that future societies will be more humane, more just, more enlightened, and more prosperous than they are now. Postmodernists deny this Enlightenment faith in science and technology as instruments of human progress. Indeed, many postmodernists hold that the misguided (or unguided) pursuit of scientific and technological knowledge led to the development of technologies for killing on a massive scale in World War II. Some go so far as to say that science and technology—and even reason and logic—are inherently destructive and oppressive, because they have been used by evil people, especially during the 20th century, to destroy and oppress others.

4. Reason and logic are universally valid—i.e., their laws are the same for, or apply equally to, any thinker and any domain of knowledge. For postmodernists, reason and logic too are merely conceptual constructs and are therefore valid only within the established intellectual traditions in which they are used.

5. There is such a thing as human nature; it consists of faculties, aptitudes, or dispositions that are in some sense present in human beings at birth rather than learned or instilled through social forces. Postmodernists insist that all, or nearly all, aspects of human psychology are completely socially determined.

6. Language refers to and represents a reality outside itself. According to postmodernists, language is not such a "mirror of nature," as the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty characterized the Enlightenment view. Inspired by the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, postmodernists claim that language is semantically self-contained, or self-referential: the meaning of a word is

not a static thing in the world or even an idea in the mind but rather a range of contrasts and differences with the meanings of other words. Because meanings are in this sense functions of other meanings—which themselves are functions of other meanings, and so on—they are never fully "present" to the speaker or hearer but are endlessly "deferred." Self-reference characterizes not only natural languages but also the more specialized "discourses" of particular communities or traditions; such discourses are embedded in social practices and reflect the conceptual schemes and moral and intellectual values of the community or tradition in which they are used. The postmodern view of language and discourse is due largely to the French philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the originator and leading practitioner of deconstruction.

7. Human beings can acquire knowledge about natural reality, and this knowledge can be justified ultimately on the basis of evidence or principles that are, or can be, known immediately, intuitively, or otherwise with certainty. Postmodernists reject philosophical foundationalism—the attempt, perhaps best exemplified by the 17th-century French philosopher René Descartes's dictum cogito, ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"), to identify a foundation of certainty on which to build the edifice of empirical (including scientific) knowledge.

8. It is possible, at least in principle, to construct general theories that explain many aspects of the natural or social world within a given domain of knowledge—e.g., a general theory of human history, such as dialectical materialism. Furthermore, it should be a goal of scientific and historical research to construct such theories, even if they are never perfectly attainable in practice. Postmodernists dismiss this notion as a pipe dream and indeed as symptomatic of an unhealthy tendency within Enlightenment discourses to adopt "totalizing" systems of thought (as the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas called them) or grand "metanarratives" of human biological, historical, and social development (as the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard claimed). These theories are pernicious not merely because they are false but because

they effectively impose conformity on other perspectives or discourses, thereby oppressing, marginalizing, or silencing them. Derrida himself equated the theoretical tendency toward totality with totalitarianism.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Mention the six contexts of Ginsberg's Diversity of Morals.

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2) What is diatopical exchange of Pannikar?

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14.6 KEY WORDS

Situation Ethics: Is the kind of approach to morality we might expect from an existentialist, who tends to reject the very idea of human nature or any nature or essence.

Perceptual Relativism: sense perception a necessary constituent of human nature, this in itself opens the door to certain relativism.

Kairos: moment of decision, the fullness of time.

Masochism: the enjoyment of something that most people would find unpleasant or painful.

14.7 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1) Define Ethics and its importance.
2) Illustrate Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics.
3) Mention the six contexts of Ginsberg's Diversity of Morals.
4) What is diatopical exchange of Pannikar?

14.8 SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. See Section 14.2
2. See Section 14.3

Check Your Progress 2

1. See Section 14.4
2. Globalization, today, is proceeding along very unethical lines and has been elaborated by a culture that prides itself on being a model for all the world, one whose very pretensions to democracy and family values cloud well be questioned. It is by what Pannikar calls a "diatopical" exchange – a dialogue between cultures – that societies can learn from one another, challenge each other and grow together, without being obliged to model themselves on one allegedly "higher" level of intellectual development. Some cultures may have a lot to offer others from one angle while they need to learn from others as regards another aspect. Paolo Freire, for instance, opined that third world cultures should learn from the technological development of the west but, in their turn, have a lot to offer the latter from the way they have learnt to preserve family values and a less destructive way of relating to nature. In all this, it is human nature adequately considered that is to be repeatedly brought into the area of discussion, sharing and debate whenever we feel decisions and judgments have to be made.