The crucial way of salvation, of the triumph of gift over threat and of the fruitful, loving unity of mankind, must not be obscured. The other-centredness which is demanded in all relationships and assumes intimate in depth marriage, remains, in a world also characterized by threat and self-centredness, a way of dying to self often in a painful manner. It remains a way of the Cross. In quite a different fashion the loving life of the celibate is exposed to the danger of selfishness only to be overcome by his taking the cross as it is offered to him. As far as cross-bearing is concerned and precisely in the area of sexuality, there seems no compelling reason to believe that the married will get off more lightly than the celibate. In the world of gift and threat, however, the celibate's surrender of the fulfilment of one aspect of his gift can, in combination with the married's affirmation of that precisely as gift for others, and in the context of joyful generous community service, bear witness to the power of God in Christ as he invites all men to enjoy the Consummation already achieved in Christ.

# Notes after Foucault[1]
# by Bernard Sharratt

> ' . . . the slightest alteration in the relation between man and the signifier . . . changes the whole course of history by modifying the lines which anchor his being.
> It is in precisely this way that Freudianism is seen to have founded an intangible but radical revolution. No need to collect witnesses to the fact: everything involving not just the human sciences, but the destiny of man, politics, metaphysics, literature, art, advertising, propaganda, and through these even the economy, everything has been affected.[2]

*Lacan: The Unconscious as Language*
The original 'slightest alteration' underlying Freud's intangible but radical revolution can be conveniently dated to 1898, when Freud, travelling to Herzegovina, turned to ask a travelling companion whether he had ever seen the famous frescoes of the 'Four Last Things' in Orvieto Cathedral, painted by ——: the painter's name would not come; 'Botticelli' and 'Boltraffio' came to mind instead. Freud's account of why he had failed to recall the right name, 'Signorelli', contains the core of his later theories. 'Signorelli' had

[1]This article began as a review of Michel Foucault's *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Gallimard, 1966; English translation: *The Order of Things*, Tavistock, 1970.
[2]Lacan, L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient, ou la raison depuis Freud, *Ecrits*, Editions du Seuil, 1966, p. 527.

been replaced through a series of transformations: 'Signor-' into 'Herr', recalling both *Her*zegovina-and-Bosnia and an anecdote about attitudes to death and sex in which the sentence 'Sir (Herr), what is there to be said?' had been the punch-line. This anecdote had linked to an earlier incident when Freud, while staying at Trafoi in the Tyrol, had heard of a patient's suicide because of an incurable sexual disorder. Thus, the 'forgotten' 'Signorelli' produced 'Herzegovina-and-Bosnia', '*Bo*-snia' conflated with '-elli' to produce 'Bo-ttic-elli', 'Herzegovina', via 'Herr', indirectly produced 'Trafoi', which conflated with '*Bo*-snia' to produce 'Bo-l-traffio'. The trigger for this process was the suppression by Freud of part of the anecdote about sexual attitudes, itself an aspect of his wanting to forget the news that had reached him at Trafoi. Instead of 'forgetting' that news, it had re-emerged in the displacing of a name he wanted to remember.[1]

It is the connexion between Freudian analysis and linguistic structures, apparent in this simple example, that has been revived in recent years by Jacques Lacan.

Lacan has grasped the parallels between Freud's terms, Verdichtung (condensation) and Verschiebung (displacement), and the ancient terms of rhetoric, metaphor and metonymy, recognizing that the processes apparent in the interaction of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' are those already familiar as stylistic tropes—that, indeed, the unconscious is structured as a language.

The 'unconscious', in fact, speaks to us: an incredibly alive and endless patter which obeys no conventional rules, but puns outrageously, strings chains of echoes, leaps to connexions by assonance, rhyme and association, flows and spirals round obscene and absurd meanings; its discourse is the language of poetry, of dreams, of insanity. But it is also a structured language that the unconscious speaks: a structure given not by the logic of linear, rational discourse, but by the deeper structures of the entire language, grasped as a simultaneous totality, a system—and not a system of words only, but that whole order of signs and symbolic codes into which we are born.

This account of the unconscious offers the possibility of re-thinking the model of the interaction between conscious and unconscious. We tend to take Freud to mean something like two 'levels', with all the dangers implicit in that of using misleading terms like 'inner' and 'outer'. Lacan's work suggests a different model, which a simple example might help to illustrate. I am now typing this article from a handwritten version, amended and corrected in places, which is being dictated by someone else, though I can also read the manuscript from which he is dictating. At the same time, the news is coming over the radio and there is a conversation going on near me.

[1]Cf. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Standard Edition, Vol. VI, ch. I.

I am, in other words, following more or less attentively a number of simultaneous discourses. Some of these discourses reduplicate each other—where the manuscript, the dictation and the typescript coincide; others diverge or clash—where I glance at one version of the manuscript while the corrected version is being dictated, or where my attention is caught more by a news item than by what is being dictated and I am typing; I then find myself, for example, typing a word prompted by a phrase in the news that has no place in the article at all. I am also, of course, trying to follow various 'rules': grammatical rules, stylistic considerations, typing conventions and even rhythms. It seems to me that it is this kind of simultaneous presence of multiple discourses in the same 'field' that offers us the best model for the interaction of conscious and unconscious. The strings of nonsense we hear talking to us as we slip asleep, obstinate tunes in the head, or getting two stations at once on the radio, are cognate analogues or even examples. Indeed, in Lacan's view, we are almost like radio receivers, open to multiple wave-lengths at the same time; we are no longer primarily transmitters, as a theory based on the Ego of the Cogito would have us believe; man is ex-centric to himself, sunk inescapably in an autonomous medley of verbal threads, of spirals of signifying chains.[1]

*Levi-Strauss: Myths thinking themselves out*

Here Lacan's work intersects with that of Levi-Strauss, who can write of the 'inversion of the relationship between the sender and the receiver since, in the end, the receiver reveals himself as signified by the message of the sender'. To investigate the 'sender' in the case of myths is not, for Levi-Strauss, 'to show how men think the myths, but rather how the myths think themselves out in men and without men's knowledge'.[2] Levi-Strauss began his major revaluations by finding in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* codes and rules of exchange governing marriage which, without the knowledge of the partners involved, 'thought themselves out' in their complicated kinship relations, by an almost algebraic logic. The inquiries of the later *Mythologiques* are directly concerned with the logic of myths, and again the structures we see emerging are those of condensation, displacement, transformation; the permutations of language are figured in the endless re-patterings of mythic elements. But myths, like dreams, 'run up against a lack of taxonomatic material for the representation of such logical articulations as causality, contradiction hypothesis, etc.'[3]

[1]Cf. Lacan, Fonction et champ de la parole et du language en psychanalyse; L'instance de la lettre . . . ; Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je, in *Ecrits*; Le stade du miroir is translated in *New Left Review*, 51. For the philosophical context and history behind Lacan's de-centring of the subject, cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: an essay on interpretation*, tr. D. Savage, Yale U.P. 1970, pp. 42-55.
[2]Levi-Strauss, *Mythologiques I: Le Cru et le cuit*, 1964, 'Ouverture'.
[3]Lacan, L'instance de la lettre.

In general, 'the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)' and, Levi-Strauss would claim, 'we may be able to show that the same logical processes operate in myth as in science, and that man has always been thinking equally well; the improvement lies not in an alleged progress of man's mind, but in the discovery of new areas to which it may apply its unchanged and unchanging powers'.[1]

## Formulae of Exclusion

At this point the work of Michel Foucault becomes relevant, for a number of converging reasons. Part of the project common to Lacan and Levi-Strauss is that of trying to penetrate and understand discourses which are, at first reading, incomprehensible (the language of myth or the language of the unconscious, the discourse of the deranged and the insane), to restore their meaning, recapture their sense. Foucault's first book, *Madness and Civilisation*,[2] tried to recapture the meaning of madness in a different way: the historical and social meaning of the way in which different periods have defined and classified madness. He begins from the fact that 'from the High Middle Ages to the Crusades, leprosaria had multiplied their cities of the damned over the entire face of Europe'; then, at the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world; but though the leper vanished, almost, from memory, these leprosaria remained, waiting from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. Then, 'often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar. . . . Poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds" would take the part played by the leper. With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain.' But what logic classified *together* the poor, the criminal and the insane in their shared confinement? At the origin of this 'abusive amalgam of heterogeneous elements,' argues Foucault, 'there must have existed a unity which justified its urgency; between these diverse forms and the classical period that called them into being, there must have been a principle of cohesion.' 'To inhabit the reaches long since abandoned by the lepers, they chose a group that to our eyes is strangely mixed and confused. But what is for us merely an undifferentiated sensibility must have been, for those living in the classical age, a clearly articulated perception.' Foucault finds that that principle of cohesion 'organizes into a complex unity a new sensibility to poverty and to the duties of assistance, new forms of reaction to the economic problems of unemployment and idleness, a new ethic of work, and also the dream of a city where moral obligation was joined to civil law, within the

---

[1]Levi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale*, 1958, ch. 11.
[2]*Histoire de la folie à l'Age Classique*, Plon, 1961, tr. R. Howard, *Madness and Civilisation*, Tavistock, 1967. Cf. also *Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical*, P.U.F.

authoritarian forms of constraint'. It was the moral condemnation of idleness that provided the generic category: the treatment of the poor, the criminal and the insane is in continuity with the suppression of beggars as the economic revival of the early seventeenth century got under way; the Great Confinement can be dated from 1656.[1] The coherence of the classification held until the end of the eighteenth century, when, slowly, poverty became detached, assumed its place within a different and mainly economic set of connexions: 'Men had seen unemployment assume, during crises, an aspect that could no longer be identified with that of sloth' or of transgression. The confusion of moral and economic interpretations of poverty continued to haunt the nineteenth century, but the decisive break within the categories of confinement had been made. New classifications emerged to cover criminals, while madmen became conflated for a time with, for example, 'marauding beasts' (in the Revolution's laws of 1790). By the end of the nineteenth century, Freud could begin to claim that madness was, after all, only madness—a phenomenon in its own right, an object deserving its own science, its specific analysis.

But there a complex paradox awaited. In recognizing the locus of madness in the dislocation of discourse between the sane and the insane, the doctor and the patient, Freud also recognized that the barriers of classification between the sane and the insane would barely hold, would have to be re-drawn. The paradox was already latent: the Age of Reason had been logical even in its madness; Paul Zacchias (*Quaestiones medico-legales*, 1660) had uncovered the logic of the insane: a syllogism in a man letting himself starve to death: 'The dead do not eat, I am dead, hence I do not eat'; induction extended to infinity in a man suffering from persecution illusions: 'A, B and C are my enemies; all of them are men; therefore all men are my enemies'; enthymeme in 'Most of those who have lived in this house are dead, hence I, who have lived in this house, am dead'. Zacchias concludes: 'From these things, you truly see how best to discuss the intellect'. From Freud's slips of the tongue, we too began to see how best to discuss the intellect. But—bearing Levi-Strauss in mind—not only the individual intellect. If the classical age operated with such alien categories of classification in its response to a madness which reflected its own logic, what are we to make of its other categories of classification—those self-confident sciences of Enlightenment. It is this question that pre-occupies Foucault in his second major work, the difficult but important *Les Mots et Les Choses*.

[1]In the late sixteenth century, Paris contained 30,000 'beggars' in a total population of 100,000; by 1650 a large part of this indigent population had been evicted or forced into work, but the 1656 Decree still resulted in the confinement of about 6,000.

*Separating Nature from Word: The end of Resemblances*

If *Madness and Civilisation* wrestled with the problem of excluding the Other, *The Order of Things* struggles with defining the Same. The work, Foucault reveals, first arose out of a passage in Borges, which quotes 'a certain Chinese encyclopaedia' as classifying animals into '(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water-pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. The obvious problem is that we cannot think (with) that classification, cannot grasp the underlying order, the principles of categorization. In Foucault's terms, we do not share the *epistémé* of the alleged Chinese encyclopaedist; his categories are not, for us, situated within a common space that would allow us to grasp his distinctions, we do not share the conditions, the way of ordering the world, that make that kind of classification, that kind of theory, that kind of knowledge possible. Put simply, we could have no shared premises from which to argue with him against that incredible list. Yet, normally, theoretical arguments can occur. In Foucault's view, we 'must constitute the general system to thought whose network renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible. It is this network that defines the conditions that make a controversy or problem possible.' He argues that there are two discontinuities in the conditions for Western knowledge, one about the mid-seventeenth century, another at the close of the eighteenth century. Across those discontinuities, blank incomprehension is possible: the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, speaks of Aldrovandi, the great botanist of Bologna (1522-1607), as totally lacking 'the critical faculty', since his work indiscriminately lists both 'scientific facts' and fabulous beliefs. Aldrovandi's *Historia serpentum et draconum* is indeed arranged under the headings:

> equivocations (the various meanings of 'Serpent'), synonyms and etymologies, differences, form and description, anatomy, nature and habits, temperament, coitus and generation, voice, movements, places, diet, physiognomy, antipathy, sympathy, modes of capture, death and wounds caused by the serpent, modes and signs of poisoning, remedies, epithets, denominations, prodigies and presages, monsters, mythology, gods to which it is dedicated, fables, allegories and mysteries, hieroglyphics, emblems and symbols, proverbs, coinage, miracles, riddles, devices, heraldic signs, historical facts, dreams, simulacra and statues, use in human diet, use in medicine, miscellaneous uses.

In 1657 Jonston's *Historia naturalis de quadrupedibus* has a section on 'The Horse' sub-divided into: name, anatomical parts, habitat, ages, generation, voice, movements, sympathy and antipathy, uses, medicinal uses. Linnaeus (1707-1778) proposed in his *Systema*

*naturae* regular chapter-divisions for each animal of: name, theory, kind, species, attributes, use, and, as a final category, *Litteraria*—the appropriate traditions, beliefs, poetical figures, etc. At first sight, Aldrovandi might seem simply to include Jonston's categories, and Linnaeus to restore the 'Litteraria' omitted by Jonston. But the real difference is located elsewhere: in the separation that occurs between Aldrovandi and Jonston and is maintained by Linnaeus—the separation inserted into Aldrovandi's interwoven texture between what the animal *is* and what is *said about it*. For Aldrovandi shares in a non-Classical epistémé in which all reality is 'legend', is to be 'read', whether the Book of Nature, the Book of Books (the Bible), other books, or books on books (the great Commentaries). His world is structured by *resemblances*, an order of similitudes, visible in cosmic signatures and graffiti, natural blazons and emblems; nature and word intertwine as one great text, to be interpreted by the interlocking signs of convenientia, aemulatio, analogia and sympathy. Knowledge is one unbroken weave of endless addition, asymptotic commentary.

### *Attribution/Articulation; Designation/Derivation*

The epistémé shared by Jonston and Linnaeus, however, establishes a different relationship between nature and word, that of representation: a gap appears between thing and name; instead of resemblances, the quest is for identities and differences, to be pinned down and classified in a new taxonomy. In the fields of General Grammar, and Analysis of Wealth, as in Natural History, Foucault traces the Classical period's new conditions of knowledge. Each field can be configured as a quadrilateral, its corners occupied by the techniques of attribution, articulation, designation and derivation. In Natural History *attribution* rests on the visible characteristics of individual animals, in General Grammar on the function of the verb in a proposition, in Analysis of Wealth on the objects which are reckoned as needs; these combine with the modes of *articulation* (in the double sense of linking and differentiating) by, respectively, descriptive classification, specific naming, and economic exchange, to allow the crucial notions of each discipline to emerge: the 'structure' of beings, the 'ars combinatoria' (the hoped-for universal language, clear and distinct precision), the 'value' of things. *Designation* and *derivation* combine in a similar way: in Natural History, designation of species and the juxtaposition of beings together produce 'generic characters'; in General Grammar, primitive names and tropes (degrees of rhetorical and other displacement from the original norm of precision) engender encyclopaedias; in Analysis of Wealth, the monetary pledge operates with circulation of trade to make notions of price possible.

Natural History, then, occurs in the connexions between animal structure and generic character, General Grammar tries to combine

universal language with encyclopaedic accuracy, Analysis of Wealth exists between the poles of price and value. But these two central concepts in each discipline are not directly linked: the justification for their connexion is not internal, scientific, but rests on metaphysical beliefs: in the belief that things can be represented (that attribution and derivation are compatible—that, for example, objects of need are involved in the circulation of trade) and in the belief in an unbroken continuum of beings (that articulation is not divorced from designation—that, for example, the reliance on money within exchange is justified, or that no describable monster will appear that can't be fitted into a form of species).

It is, of course, difficult to *think* these connexions (and impossible to summarize them adequately)[1] but not just because they are complicated and multiple. We also cannot think them directly, because the épistémé they indicate can only be thought within one field or another: in itself it is an *a priori* of thought, a tacit condition of theory and connection. Moreover, we now operate in a different épistémé, one that—as Foucault also demonstrates—has re-patterned the quadrilateral, linking (in the sciences of Philology, Biology and Political Economy) articulation rather to designation and attribution to derivation. The metaphysical spaces left open by the Classical épistémé have been closed, by phonetics, comparative anatomy and the analysis of production on one side and by syntax, physiology and the analysis of distribution on the other. Again, summary is vain, but Foucault's brilliant analysis allows us to see where new philosophical problems have now been opened up (since, perhaps, the 1840s?), resulting in attempts (in hermeneutics) to link significa-tion and history ('designation' and 'derivation') and (in structuralism) to forge a fusion between formal ontology and formal logic ('articula-tion' and 'attribution').

*The transformation of deep structures of thought: from Man to Language?*

The evidence used by Foucault may be unfamiliar, the mode of argument even more so.[2] But his achievement is clear: he has provided an exact account of what is so often felt, in the study of a period, as a set of common assumptions and premises, within which, but not about which, major theoretical disagreement is possible. It is this kind of inquiry, into what might also be called the deep structure of thought in a period, that he terms 'archaeologi-cal' analysis; it undercuts the history of opinions, history of ideas, intellectual history—merely 'doxological' inquiry. An archaeology of the sciences takes us to an area of embedded 'logic' that recalls Levi-Strauss's analyses, not just in their method but also in their conclusion: 'Not that reason made any progress: it was simply that the mode of being of things, and of the order that divided them up

---

[1]The closest Foucault comes to summary is in pp. 214-221 (ET, pp. 200-208).
[2]Foucault examines his own method in *L'Archéologie du savoir*, Gallimard, 1970.

before presenting them to the understanding, was profoundly altered'.[1] Put very crudely, Foucault's is a kaleidoscopic view of the intellect in history: shaken at certain points, it re-settles in a new pattern, with variations on the same problems inter-connected in changed ways (some problems as 'solved', some as newly 'open'). The logic of Foucault's own position has led him not only to assert that 'Man' no longer has his classical place in our epistémé (he, like Lacan, de-centres Man), but also to an attempt to uncover the foundations of the *whole* Western epistémé, including its periodic transformations. In *L'Ordre du Discours* (1971) Foucault suggest his future lines of inquiry, and they ultimately involve a return to that abortive epistem-ological break we recognize in the Sophists. The 'sophisms' rejected by Greek philosophy—of the kind contained, for example, in Borges's categories (h) and (l) above, or examined in Lacan's first important article[2]—rest on an epistémé we cannot think, for it refuses the distinctions of true/false and same/other and proposes an alternative logic. Were we to recover that epistémé, or arrive at a transformation of it (rather than yet another trans-formation of the epistémé underlying Aristotle and his progeny), then, Foucault hopes, we might demolish the dominance of the signifier over the signified (*cf.* Saussure, Freud, Lacan) and admit the event of discourse to a new place, no longer squeezed between thinking and speaking. To see what is involved here (and perhaps to indicate the difficult notion of 'discourse') we can gropingly extra-polate from the present growing role of linguistic models sketched above: for language itself to displace Man, the subject, from the centre of our epistémé is not entirely inconceivable. We can see something of the possibilities in the return to Freud's discovery of the autonomous discourse of the unconscious, but also in some insights of McLuhan and in such literary phenomena as found poetry, Beckett's *Lessness* and Burroughs's cut-ups. The prospect is terrifying perhaps, for we are prone to feel overwhelmed even by our present half-awareness of the buzz of discourse. Yet the possibility is not entirely without a kind of precedent: Marx's analysis of the reification of money or the fetishism of commodities perhaps marks the beginnings of a similar process, now familiar, of Man dominated and displaced by the Economy.

*Why does the kaleidoscope shake? The imprisonment of Désir*

But to mention Marx is to raise a query against Foucault. Marxism has accustomed us to accept the development of modes of production as an almost autonomous process; as such, it can provide a base from which to explain developments in other sectors. Clearly, the argument of *Madness and Civilisation* can be linked to a Marxist interpretation

[1] *Les Mots et les choses*, p. 14 (ET, p. xxii).
[2] *Le temps logique et l'assertion de certitude anticipée: un nouveau sophisme*, *Cahiers d'Art* (1945), pp. 32-42.

of the relation between the development of capitalism and the moral emphasis on work. But no such motor is apparent in the argument of *The Order of Things*: little account is given of how and why the transition from one epistémé to another occurs. Foucault's enigmatic suggestion in *L'Ordre du discours* is that it is a matter of chance (le hasard), but in practice, in analysing de Sade's work as signalling the shift from Classical to nineteenth-century epistémé, he offers another explanation: 'The obscure but stubborn spirit of a people who (actually) talk, the violence and the endless effort of life, the hidden energy of needs, were all to escape from the mode of being of representation'—and in emancipating themselves from representation destroy the epistémé grounded in representation.

Here, however, we are back in the world of Lacan. Lacan's theory distinguishes between 'désir' and need and demand. Désir is the 'hidden energy' of the Other (the unconscious), which becomes trapped in the labyrinth of institutionalized language as soon as it tries to formulate itself as need; what emerges is a demand that can be specifically satisfied but only to leave a residue of inarticulate unfulfilment. Désir can never, in fact, be met, for it is at root the desire of and for the Other that speaks in us. Lacan sees the genesis of this unutterable and unsatisfiable desire in the mirror-phase of child-hood: that stage when, in order to struggle from animal birth to human life, we identify ourselves with an ideal-image of ourselves—as the motor-inco-ordinated child tries to become its apparently perfectly-formed mirror-reflection. We need the Ich-Ideal, the self-image, to achieve identity; but that image is given only in the cluster of roles that await us in the social world of signs, symbols and signifiers, and those signs (in the Father and the Law, Order and Death) deny the Other whose realm is the unconscious language. That denial is, however, specific, is rooted initially in the role-assigning family into which the child is born, as Freud, Lacan and Foucault (*in Madness and Civilisation*) all recognize. And the family, too, is encoded, whether by the incest-regulations studied by Levi-Strauss or by the patriarchal and exogamic kinship-structures of contemporary Western society, with their accompanying determinate ideological formations that govern the roles of paternity, maternity, conjugality and childhood.[1] And family-structures and familial ideology are interlocked into the specific economic structures and political ideologies of the societies that contain them.[2]

It is *perhaps* through this route that any analysis of the origins of epistém-ological transformations might proceed: the new epistémé answering to new needs formulable within new familial and social codes arising out of changed economic contexts in ways that we can track within a Marxist frame. But man, of course, remains radically

---

[1]Cf. Louis Althusser, Freud et Lacan, *La Nouvelle Critique*, December, 1964/January, 1965.
[2]Cf. my article in *New Blackfriars*, February, 1971.

de-centred still. Whether the emphasis lies on the development of economic formations, on the hidden energy of désir, or on the availability of a language to translate désir into different needs, the problem remains: man seems dominated by chance and/or necessity. Can we now see a way of cracking this problem? We cannot. For the solution requires, at least, a new epistémé in which to be thought. But we can perhaps push towards the limits of our epistémé.

### Lessons from the Fate of Ought

When George Eliot considered 'the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men—the words God, Immortality, Duty' and 'pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third',[1] she was acknowledging that, in the nineteenth-century epistémé, 'God' was, strictly, inconceivable: part of the definition of an epistémé is what is *not* thinkable within it. But she was also pointing to an element of absolute necessity felt within that epistémé, the necessity of Duty, 'the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law', the demand of Ought. We could perhaps trace the origins of this sense of Ought to George Eliot's own family and social origins; but more clearly we can locate that particular intuition of Ought in the development of moral language generally. Alasdair MacIntyre's two recent essays provide a groundwork.[2] His historical-linguistic analysis distinguishes 'three stages in the use of "ought": a first in which "ought" and "owe" are indistinguishable; a second in which "ought" has become an auxiliary verb, usable with an infinitive to give advice; and a third in which the use of "ought" has become unconditional'—the final moral appeal. MacIntyre places these different stages of meaning at different historical stages. The equation of 'ought' with 'owe' occurs in a mediaeval society of feudal duties and obligations, whether in Britain (e.g. Wyntoun's 'Robert the Brus, Erle of Karagh, aucht to succeed to be Kynrike') or in the society of the Norse sagas ruled by vendetta-obligations; we can clearly relate this stage to the kind of analysis Levi-Strauss has performed on kinship-rules, with their 'obligations' governing who 'ought' to marry whom, in a relationship of exchange and gifts given and owed.[3] The second stage of 'ought' is in the form of a 'You ought to do X if . . .', the conditional clause referring to some good aimed at; the necessary logic of this stage is an agreement, ultimately, that there is some final good, though different moral systems may define the 'good' in differing ways. The third stage tends to arise when the question can be put: '*Which* moral system ought I to follow?', which is strictly unanswerable (indeed, a

---

[1] The original version of this famous incident is in *Century Magazine* 23 (November, 1881).
[2] MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, Duckworth 1971, chs. 15 and 16.
[3] Cf. the connections between Levi-Strauss's and Marcel Mauss's work.

sophism) since the ground for an 'ought' of that kind can only arise *within* a moral system. That stage easily shades into a situation where 'ought' is increasingly emptied of its moral significance. One of the dilemmas facing Marxism, for example, is the question: 'Why ought I to be a Marxist?' One tendency, in present 'Communist' societies, is to answer that question with the totalitarian response: you ought to be a Marxist because that is the rule of the society.

With this in mind, I want to suggest a parallel problem for theology. Bernard Lonergan has recently conceded that there is a discontinuity in *Insight* between his analyses of intellectual conversion and of religious or Christian conversion (the problem of why 'ought' I to believe).[1] This is, it seems to me, a symptom of a broader discontinuity in theology at present: a gap between the modes of argument, assumptions, evidence and vocabulary employed in theology 'within' the discourse of faith (the re-interpretation of beliefs) and the kind of language available for a theology concerned with the move 'into' the discourse of faith. Lonergan's recent emphasis on re-building theology from the experience of 'conversion' at least acknowledges this discontinuity as central.[2] But the discontinuity is, as Lonergan, also seems partially to realize, a discontinuity of cultures;[3] in other words (I would argue), theological discourse within faith has accommodated itself to some extent to the present epistémé, while much theology of conversion still tends to have hidden roots in a previous epistémé (proofs for the existence of God, etc). The bridge between the two tends to be unargued, either assumed, as in Lonergan's work,[4] or simply asserted, as, for example, in Terry Eagleton's recent argument *based* on the 'certainty' of the Christian.[5] Yet 'certainty' would seem to be at the same stage of its history as 'ought': the real epistemological question is not about certainty within systems of thought or ideologies, nor even about how I can be certain about which ideology is 'true', but, more deeply, *why should* I be certain about anything? Foucault's attempted return to the Sophists acknowledges the new twist in an old question (Descartes' '*How can* I be certain about anything?'). Christians, on the other hand, tend towards a Stalinist response: you can be certain because the rules of the society tell you you can be (revelation, magisterium, infallibility, etc.)[6]

## *Theological directions*

At the moment, I feel that we cannot think an answer to the moral

[1]Cf. 'I'd be quite ready to say: let's drop chapter XIX out of *Insight* and put it inside theology', interview in *Clergy Review*, June 1971, p. 426.
[2]Cf. Curran, Christian conversion in the writings of Bernard Lonergan, in *Foundations of Theology: papers from the International Lonergan Congress* 1970, ed. McShane, Macmillan, 1971.
[3]Lonergan, Dimensions of Meaning, *Collection*, 1967, ch. 16.
[4]Cf. C. Davis, Lonergan and the teaching church, in *Foundations of Theology*.
[5]Eagleton, Faith and revolution, *New Blackfriars*, April, 1971.
[6]The problem of 'certainty', of course, was the final pre-occupation of Wittgenstein, cf. *On Certainty*, 1969.

dilemma or to the ideological dilemma. But *if* we want to continue trying to do 'theology', then the direction might be an exploration of Foucault's suggestion that the philosophical space opened up in our present *episté mé* points towards a fusion of formal ontology and 'logic' with a hermeneutics of history. There are some more or less preliminary steps we still need to take in that direction. We need an adequate historical-linguistic analysis of the word 'God' itself in relation to changing epistémés, an archaeological not doxological inquiry. Paul van Buren tried unsuccessfully to begin this task, in his analyses of the 'logic' of Chalcedon;[1] Lonergan and Dewart have approached the related problem of the 'dehellenizing of dogma' and, in this journal, Hugo Meynell has proposed a Lonergonian approach to 'development of doctrine'.[2] But Foucault's argument, I think, undercuts these approaches: Meynell, for example, argues that 'homoousios' indicates the adoption not of a Hellenic concept but of a Hellenic *technique*, which consists primarily in 'wean(ing) thought away from the primitive level by making abstraction possible'; but Foucault (and Levi-Strauss) would tend to reply that the Hellenic technique of abstraction is no more and no less valid than the 'science of the concrete' or 'resemblance' or 'representation' in other epistémés, and may be less appropriate for resolving certain logical contradictions.[3] If we remember that Christology and Trinitarian doctrine are basically concerned with the peculiar logic of Same/Other distinctions, then Foucault's struggles with the notions of Same and Other may help us. If we also try to think within a Hebraic episté mé in which both 'Les Mots' and 'Les Choses' (and 'les actes') could be translated by the single word, *d$^e$barim*, then perhaps we can begin to grasp what the archaeological level of an episté mé is. The second step we might try to take would be a further exploration of the logic of that word spoken by Lacan's Other.[4] The logic of madness, at the verge of the late eighteenth-century epistémological break, gave us the theological insights of Christopher Smart and William Blake; the peculiar logic of music (akin, of course, in Levi-Strauss, to the logic of myths) has already been brilliantly suggested, by Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, as the only—though (in Schoenberg's scheme) inappropriate—language of public revelation for the unutterably Other that 'lives out its life in me'. The deep *désir* of the Other in us may be, as Augustine recognized, a desire that can find no rest except in the divine. To explore this view of man may be the only way to begin to handle the Feuerbachian recognition that 'God' is a projection of Man's needs.

[1] Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, 1963, ch. II.
[2] Dewart, *The Foundations of Belief*, 1969, Lonergan. The dehellenization of dogma, *Theological Studies*, June, 1967. Meynell, On dogmas and world-views, *New Blackfriars*, October, 1970.
[3] The study of 'Comparative Religion' can, perhaps, contribute to *theology* (as distinct from sociology) only if it tackles the 'epistemic' differences?
[4] Some recent (unpublished) essays by Sebastian Moore are the only English theology I know to be influenced by Lacan.

But if the transformations of epistémés require accompanying economic, social, familial and political changes, then we must also agree with Marcel Xhaufflaire (the best recent interpreter of Feuerbach) that 'theology' faces a period of praxis first.[1] It is worth remembering that Régis Debray, like Michel Foucault, is a student of the Marxist Louis Althusser, and that Lacan's group of psycho-analysts played an active role in the May '68 événements.

We have long suppressed the other, unwelcome, aspect of the news of self-chosen death that reached us at Golgotha—the task of re-creating the world. Only after we have returned to that might we be able to recall the forgotten name of the author of the four last things—not Signor Signorelli, but 'that which we call "God" '. But perhaps some things are best displaced and forgotten—for a time?

# The Burden of the White Man's God
## by Rob van der Hart, O.P.

In the land of our fathers there are many strangers. They have drifted away from their homes, across the sea, into the New World which they held to be 'undiscovered'. Why did they seek a new land, and why did they leave their own? Why did they leave behind the soil from which they were born; why did they break away from the womb to which they belong?

With their minds disconnected—and freed—from the earth, they could master the forces of nature. And so they took possession of the land that seemed so empty, so much there for the taking, because no one claimed it. They did not know that man does not naturally possess the land to which he belongs; he does not say: 'I own this soil'. For how can we own the soil from which we are born and to which we will return? Is not man's life encompassed by the earth and her dark forces, as in a wider dimension from which things and deeds receive their meaning?

Primitive man still knows this: he knows that the heat of the sun is only a blessing when it enkindles the potentialities of the earth, not when it scorches, burns into things so that everything withers. The warmth of God is felt in the fire that burns within the dark energies of the earth and that brings them to life. The God of natural man is an inward God whom he meets when dwelling with the mystery of his own existence, birth and death: the womb from which he is born and into which he will return. The earth is not God, but God is the earth, for here is the place where the divine presence is felt.

[1]Xhaufflaire, *Feuerbach et la théologie de la secularisation*, 1970.