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Pregledni naučni rad

**CONFESSION AS A MEANS OF PRODUCING TRUTH
AND SEXUALITY IN MICHEL FOUCAULT'S PHILOSOPHY**

**ISPOVIJEST KAO SREDSTVO PROIZVODNJE ISTINE
I SEKSUALNOST U FILOZOFIJI MICHELA FOUCAULTA**

Summary

The French thinker Michel Foucault is considered as postmodernist and poststructuralist, while he regarded himself as a product of modern tradition, although his works represent a comprehensive and original critique of specifically this way of thinking.

With his ideas he wanted to make a clear distinction from other prior propensities, by joining the other postmodern theorists voice, who put efforts to show the alternatives, offered by the thitherto known modern philosophical systems, as extremely humanistic.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the treatment of confession as a means of producing truth and sexuality, which takes a central place in Foucault's works. The fact itself that he is the author of a three-volume history of sexuality says a lot about this.

The interpretation will be conducted through the content analysis technique-data reduction by categorizing or reduction of any type of qualitative material in order to identify certain consistent meanings.

Key words: truth, sexuality, confession, postmodernism

Sažetak

Francuski mislilac Michel Foucault se svrstava u postmoderniste i poststrukturaliste, iako njegova djela prvenstveno predstavljaju sveobuhvatnu i originalnu kritiku ovakvog načina razmišljanja, a dok je on na sebe gledao kao na proizvod moderne tradicije.

Pridružujući se ostalim postmodernim teoretičarima koji su svojski radili da prikažu alternative koje su dotada poznati filozofski sistemi moderne prikazali kao krajnje humanističke, Michel Foucault je želio načiniti jasnu razliku od ostalih prijašnjih sklonosti preko svojih ideja.

Glavna svrha ovog rada je ispitati obradu ispovijesti kao sredstva proizvodnje istine i seksualnosti, što predstavlja centralno mjesto Foucaultovih radova. Sama

činjenica da je Michel Foucault autor istorije seksualnosti u tri toma puno govori o prilog tome.

Tumačenje će se vršiti preko tehnike analize sadržaja-smanjenje podataka kategorizacijom ili smanjenjem bilo koje vrste kvalitativnog materijala kako bi se utvrdila određena dosljedna značenja.

Ključne riječi: istina, seksualnost, ispovijed, postmodernizam

Introduction

Historically, Foucault considers there are two major procedures to produce the truth of sex: societies granted with *ars erotica* such as China, Japan, India, ancient Rome, Arabo-Muslim societies, which are generally characterized by the fact that truth is drawn from the pleasure in itself, where practice is understood and experienced, as well as societies which practice *scientia sexualis*, which in order to tell the truth of sex, developed and put to function procedures which, in essence, are organized based on some knowledge-power form, which conflicts with the art of initiation and the major secret: it is about confession, which since medieval times, in most of these societies, was set as one of the crucial rituals in producing the truth (Foucault, 2011).

According to Foucault, this influenced our society to turn into an unusual confessors' society, since there is no society where there aren't great confessions, which are confessed, repeated and retaken as modified, be those formulas, texts, collections of lecturing rituals which are recited according to particular circumstances; things said once and are preserved as such believing they bear some secret or wealth:

“Confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life and most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, confesses illness and troubles; confession makes us say what is most difficult to tell with the utmost zeal and precision; One confesses in private and public, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about” (Foucault, 2011).

From confessions in church to talk shows, ours is a society wherein power is exercised through talk while we are a boundless mass of confessors.

Confession, the truth and sexuality

Foucault started using the word confession “for all those procedures against which the subject revives to say the truth about sexuality which may have any kind of effect on them (Foucault, 1980).

Nevertheless, there are cases when people are forced to confess, and this, according to Foucault, dates since medieval times, while it occurs when they don't do it voluntarily or led by any other inner necessity. The Christian penance also dates from these times, which continues to maintain sex as confession's central matter. “Maybe the transformation of sex into discourse, which I spoke of earlier, the dissemination and reinforcement of heterogeneous sexualities, are perhaps two elements of the same deployment: they are linked together with the help of the central element of a confession that compels individuals to articulate their sexual peculiarity-no matter how extreme” (Foucault, 2011).

And this lasted until Freud's time, until different discourses on sex denied the object they were talking about, and it is precisely thanks to him that we, “have escaped these two long centuries where the history of sexuality is shown to us, above all, as a miserable chronicle of an ever-increasing oppression”.

Foucault, in his analysis of confession, further dwells on the issue of how the general and traditional extraction of confessions managed to organize according to the scientific forms, and in line with this he distinguished five main forms: the first through codification of “speech inducement, which is achieved by combining confession with examination, the personal by deployment of a set of decipherable signs and symptoms; the second through the postulate of a general and diffuse causality – the obligation to say everything, the right to ask about everything find their justification at the principle according to which sex is equipped with inexhaustible and polymorphous causal power; the third through the principle of a latency intrinsic to sexuality — if sex truths should be compelled through the techniques of confession, this happens not simply because it is difficult to say or it is under the weight of moral prohibitions; the fourth through the method of interpretation – the need to confess doesn't appear only because the one the confession is addressed to enjoys some power to forgive, feature to console or ability to lead; the fifth through medicalization of the effects of confession – the confession and its effects we recoded under the forms of therapeutic operations, which means, foremost, that the field of sex is no longer placed under the régime of guilt and sin, excessiveness or violation, but under the regime of normal and pathological (Foucault, 2011).

What makes Foucault's analysis on sexuality important is the thesis that that what we see in the nineteenth century as the effort to avoid discourse, confession about sexuality and limiting the sexual practice, should not be considered that this oppression was effective, or effective to the extent it was thought to be. The sheer on examining sexuality and sexuality itself had unpredictable results, and it was the amplified desire to talk about sexuality and increase the pleasure that comes from breaking the ban (Mils, 2003).

“If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. This explains the solemnity with which one speaks of sex nowadays” (Foucault, 2011).

In fact, Foucault persuasively argues that sexuality is not regulated by repression but through constant incitement by talking about it as the only truth for ourselves, and by convincing ourselves every day, on different occasions and accepting all kinds of sexual practice on television and other media, through which we can see the types of relations for which he says incite sexuality: “the correlation between a domain of knowledge (a field of knowledge-concepts, theories, disciplines), a type of normativity (a set of rules – what is allowed or not allowed, the natural or the monstrous, the normal and the pathological...) and a way of relating to the self (the relation of an individual to him/herself – by which he/she comes to know him/herself as a sexual subject in relation to others)” (Foucault, 2001).

One of Foucault's goals, however, was to prove how discourse limits a major site which sexuality takes in the definitions of what is normal and pathologic in our society.

“I have been quoted as saying that there is no factual difference between the language censorship and counter-censorship, between the excessive moralists' discourse and the discourse of sexual liberation. Extremely wrong: that wasn't what I meant... Those are movements which start from sexuality, from the disposition of sexuality within which we are caught, but at the same time they are distinguished in relation to them, stop and depart from them” (Foucault, 2001).

He also raises the ways in which sexuality operates to define the truth in certain bodies and how bodies are the site that we can see in action the effects of the power to name and define (Probyn, 1997).

Leo Bersani righteously commented that “Foucault shows us that power in our societies functions primarily not by repressing spontaneous sexual drives but by producing multiple sexualities, and that through the classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined or normalized.” (Halperin, 1995)

Returning to ancient times through sexuality

After completing the first part of “The history of sexuality”, Foucault found that it is impossible to write about sexuality in modern times without returning to antiquity, a fact which will have an impact even on the approach to this problem by replacing generalizations and the small number of documents with a quite serious approach to source texts, which will be the main reason for the eight-year delay of the two subsequent volumes.

“With his return to ancient Greece, in the History of Sexuality, Foucault found his archaeological support” (Eribon, 2014).

Paul Veyne will conclude that he had shown great interest in the ancient Greeks and Romans, just like Nietzsche, his spiritual leader (Veyne, 1997). It was precisely him, the one that had helped him: Paul Veyne had unceasingly helped me throughout those years.”

“What did my contribution amount to, then?” would Veyne ask. Quite simply, very little, I have to say, for why should I fake modesty? The ideas were his (like Odysseus with his bow; abstract analysis was a weapon that only he had the strength to wield). And as for the facts and sources, Foucault had a gift for discovering on his own, within no more than a few short months, everything about a particular culture or discipline, like those polyglots who astonish us when they master a new language within a few weeks (even if they then forget it in order to learn yet another). SO my role was limited to two things: occasionally confirming his documentation, and providing encouragement and support” (Veyne, 2008).

He was obliged to undertake this journey to antiquity to oppose the prevailing theory that sexual repression derives from the seventeenth century as an accompanying phenomenon of capitalism, from which we are liberated merely now (oppressive hypothesis) set on the focus of analysis by psychoanalysis.

According to him, the early modern and modern period did not experience the intensified repression, but encouraged evermore the discourse on sex (Clarc, 1988).

In fact, this is the time when thinking that children's masturbation is dangerous begun, and that it is in need of control, that homosexuality is a permanent state of the personality, when the number of psychiatric and medical research that required the subject to talk about sex developed, and generally in all fields, sex is talked and written about.

“At the beginning of the eighteenth century, tremendous importance was suddenly ascribed to childhood masturbation, which then was persecuted everywhere like a sudden epidemic, terrible and capable of compromising the whole human race. Must one conclude from this that childhood masturbation had suddenly become unacceptable for capitalist society in the process of development? This is the position of certain “Reichians”, but it does not seem at all satisfactory to me. On the contrary, what was important at that time was the reorganization of relations between children and adults, parents, educators; it was childhood as a common area for the parents, the educational institutions, the public health authorities; it was childhood as the training-ground for future generations” (Foucault, 2001).

But the peculiarity of these discoveries and techniques, according to Foucault, is that they are not used in a repressive way as a means of control of the lower classes, as some Marxist analysts claim, but in the first place it can be said that the bourgeoisie developed and applied them on themselves as tools for improving life, vitality and the future (Foucault, 2011).

In fact, in the second volume *History of sexuality* (1984), Foucault describes the way how homosexual acts in Ancient Greece were viewed in a completely different way, respectively as an indicator of control over personal lust. For ancient Greeks, people do not differ much from one another...by the type of object they are inclined to, or the gender community they prioritize, as far as, above all, by its intensity.

Foucault also describes how by restraining sexual desires and sexual behavior, the individual is also constituted as an ethical subject:

“Ethical self-constitution, whereby one restrains the part of the self which encompasses the moral code, determines one's positioning in relation to the rules to which one adheres, determines for him/herself a certain way of life which is worthy as a moral fulfillment of him/herself” (Foucault, 1985).

According to Foucault, for ancient Greeks, the male desideratum (the great desire, necessity), of a certain class was the creation of a beautiful life, and precisely the free male of the upper class governed himself through an aesthetics of existence.

“It should imply, a way of life whose moral values did not depend either on one’s being in conformity with a code of behavior, or an effort of purification, whereby both represent Christian contributions to the development of sexual ethics, but on certain formal principles in the use of pleasures, in the way one distributed them, in the limits one observed, in the hierarchy one respected” (Foucault, 1985).

Enhancing one’s position as a free male, which would enable him to dominate others, both within the household and the community, according to Foucault, implied the regulation of sexual acts as a necessity, dealing with prudent calculation of frequency and wonder, and no distinguishing between prohibited and permitted sexual acts (Foucault, 1985).

In line with sexual ethics, which wasn’t universal and not meant for the majority but only the elite which wanted to create a brilliant life for itself compared to their fellow citizens, immorality was related to two areas: debauchery and passivity (Foucault, 1985).

It was the motive of passivity which led him to a discussion of Greek homosexual practices, since according to Greek ethics, so long as a man were the active sexual partner, it mattered not whether the other were a male or a female; a passive of either sex was consonant with his moral mastery of the self (Foucault, 1985).

According to him, the problem of homosexuality lays elsewhere, in fact, how could a free man, destined to be a citizen who governed the polis, allow himself to be an object of pleasure, to have been dominated and penetrated by another man, with whom he did not share the same pleasure.

The marriage itself also showed a dissymmetry of power whereas the wife, who was always under the husband’s control, had to restrict her sexual activity to the marital bed, the sexual regulation concerning the husband were based on completely different principles – if he chose to restrain his sexual pleasures, it was not due to the obligation to his wife, but because only thus could he exhibit his self-mastery (Foucault, 1985).

Thus, Foucault provides undeniable facts that isomorphism existed in ancient Athens between sexual relations and social relations: both in the family and

in the society, there was always one who penetrates, commands and dominates and the one who was penetrated, complies and is vanquished (Foucault, 1985).

Unlike the Greeks, in Roman sexual ethics, personal relationships of married couples were in the spotlight.

“The Greek model of male dominance and female submission were replaced by the model of reciprocity. The pleasure should be shared between husband and wife; the husband owes respect to the wife and not only to himself” (Foucault, 1986), thereby restricting sexual activities between the husband and the wife in marriage.

Even when homosexuality is concerned, the descriptive notions were borrowed from the patterns of marital relations, thus removing the sexual discourse problem of the “boy” - the man should enjoy intense erotic relationship with his wife not with another man.

With the shift of pleasure to marital partnership, according to Foucault, the greatest sexual rigorism moved away too, the strongest inclination to asceticism, different to the ancient Greeks case.\

“Medical writings now describe, to the slightest detail, the risk from sexual activity – the sexual act is compared to diseases (for instance, epilepsy) and not-normal sexual states (for instance satirizing) rather than highlighting the described lifestyle which ensures healthy sexual activity” (Foucault, 1986).

The other sign that ascetic trends were empowered, according to Foucault, lay with the motive of Hellenistic Romance by bringing the virginity (innocence) of the lover to the fore; thus the abstinence of the leading role forewarns us of Christian ascetism which will soon follow, and he uses the same words which characterize Christian ascetism.

“It is a self-mastering tendency from gender generalization, which is far more right from virgin chastity than from the clever virile governance of physical appetites” (Foucault, 1986), which is a model of restraint that he assigns to Athenian males.

According to Foucault, Christianity had brought certain change to sexual ethics.

Firstly, the aesthetics of the self, which had a central position in the ancient Greek ethics, is now replaced by the ethics of self-renunciation, since the truth of the self can be known only if by giving it up.

Moreover, even the center of discussions shifts from the area of sexual acts and the pleasure derived from them to the desire itself, since in the early Christianity, even married couple's sexual acts should be neutral, not encouraged by desire.

The desire should be completely excluded from practice, since its significance is only theoretical as a locus of the sex problem:

“Classical techniques of strictness, which were a self-mastery means, were transferred into techniques which aimed purification from desire and pleasures, whereas strictness represents a goal in itself”(Foucault, 2001).

Besides, for Christian authors, the sexual issue does not concern acts with another person, but to the problem of human solitude – for the first time, masturbation and errant thoughts become moral problems (Foucault, 1986). Just as experience of sex shifts away from personal and secret acts, Foucault suggests that a significant new task is defined:

“Self-examination, the raising up of one's sexual thoughts for analysis and discrimination. In a monastic setting such analysis often involved the advice of elder monk to an older one (Foucault, 1963).

And the last example, according to Foucault, deals with codifying sexual acts that were to be submitted to ecclesiastical authorities, which represent an important step in the development of the confessional, described as a procedure for the extortion of the truth.

He regarded such developments in Christianity as central in Greek and Roman sexual theorizing for some, while the observation on the psychoanalysts' couch for some others, by providing a locus to an essential stage in the development of sexual discourse (Clarc, 1988).

Foucault never saw an alternative to the Christian ethic in the Greeks sexual ethic, quite the contrary. From one age to another, problems are not similar, any more than is nature or reason, for which he claimed that we can never find solution to problems through analyzing the ones of other age and by offering the same solution, regardless of how similar they may seem to us.

In one of his latest interviews, he stated explicitly that the solution to an actual issue can never be found in the answers of another age, since it answers the question which has been different at the time, since there are issues that pass through the centuries, and the eternal return means also a permanent departure.

“Foucault’s relation to ancient ethics during these modern times sends a unique map, which emerges after every division: the map which implies self-perfection, re-aestheticism of the subject into two completely different ethical systems and two completely different societies” (Veyne, 1997).

There are no problems in history that are eternal, essential, or dialectical; what history offers is a unique assessment which varies from culture to culture, even from one person to another; an evaluation which, as Foucault used to say, is neither true or false: they exist, and that’s it, every person fights for his values (Veyne, 1997).

Conclusion

Foucault’s philosophy is more characterized by skepticism than authority, which is less interested to provide the truth, and more interested in reviewing of what it means to call something as true. Its importance is set on the efforts to identify and clarify the societal constructs, to question the accepted truths, such as faith and humanistic scientific progress. Foucault examines mechanisms which structure sexual desire, expressed in discourses and are subject to power techniques. Sexual repression is seen as the moment of “sexuality disposition” namely, the strategic assumptions which make sexuality useful through power. In this regard, Foucault explores hysterization of women’s body, pedagogization of children’s sex, the socialization of reproductive behavior and psychiatrism of pervert desires. The normalization of the society is a consequence of the technology of power whose center is in life. Sex not only represses, but in the discursive explosion leads us to speech. Thus, Christian confessional practices will be transferred to the scientific reproduction of the truth as an expression of the will for knowledge. The culmination of body and sexuality analysis, according to Foucault, is the exclusion of those elements that were accepted as sound and the provocation of any attitude that prays for the unchanged nature of the body, ideas that led to a rethinking of the relationship between sexual choice, determination and identity. Normality, sexuality, and even the idea of man as rational and capable of self-understanding, are conditioned and possible by inconsequential and historical constructs.

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