The sons and daughters of the masters of suspicion (“experts of suspicion,” as I like to call them) are getting better press these days. Among students they trigger a sense of familiarity and solidarity. Alarmist interpretations tend to receive less of a hearing. My own students, for instance, gravitate almost immediately to individuals such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, even if challenged by their arcane style and unfortunate life choices. Their progenitors such as Nietzsche and Marx (and to a certain extent Kant and Hegel) help students to identify with their style and concerns. Allow me to draw from this paltry demographic the suggestion that the basic assumptions of contemporary Continental thought form the common sense. Once one overcomes the barrier of abstruse language (and I admit Derrida’s books rarely make it to my bedside), the barrier between common sense and scholarly understanding begins to crumble. While impartial colleagues continue to extricate themselves from the view that all poststructuralism is, as Caputo scoffs, “nothing more than a quagmire of relativism and nihilism,” students readily embrace it as a newly found lover. For sympathizers, this can be as heartening as it can be disturbing. There is much reward in nuancing the insights of common sense. Careful readers, for instance, pick up that the will to power does not consist in the eradication of other drives, the will to truth for example. It consists in interpreting such drives vis-à-vis focused, historically relative insights. The reaction is
in response to a perceived tyranny, of reason, of morality, of religion—and this all in the name of what is commonly prized: life, creativity, imagination, profundity, futurity, moxie. My unease arises over the reflex that disdains seemingly dated methods and insights, this being the case despite the fact that these newer “methods” are forged on the basis of (usually) serious consideration of older ones. And so because particular notions such as subjectivity, objectivity, faith, reason, and God have been deconstructed and genealogized, the temptation is to reject the possibility that difference (never mind “authenticity”) may well reside in this stock of notions. Too often lip service is paid to the truism that different thinkers think nominally similar things differently. At any rate, such disdain is what is infectious about hypervigilant strategies as Foucault’s and Derrida’s. It’s characteristic of most conversions. Exuberance tends to breed truncation.

In this paper I would like to identify the driving force of this mindset motivated by the larger question of whether hypervigilance is always desirable and if not, why. Seeing as my field is philosophy of religion, my interest centers around the philosophic contributions of poststructuralists to religious studies and theology. Derrida’s contribution in this regard is weightier than Foucault’s, although Foucault scholars are presently probing the connections more deeply. The religion connection is interesting for the way in which one may adjudicate between different philosophic dispositions as evidenced by someone like Lonergan, a theologian by trade. I limit myself here, the first part of a larger project, to Foucault since consideration of his form of hypervigilance provides a smoother segue into Derrida’s significantly subtler form. Foucault is also more tenacious, which means his intentions are transparent, less challenging to outline.

Part I: Foucauldian Hypervigilance

The Contours of a Defiant Gesture
Not always accurate or reflective of the subtleties of a treatise, interviews nonetheless provide insight into the thoughts and motivations of the interviewee. For this reason I have selected a few such statements to launch us into the topic and with relative ease.

Six years before his death Michel Foucault reminisces about the political situation that led him and his contemporaries from French Hegelianism and phenomenology to avant-garde philosophies.

For me, politics was the chance to have an experience in the manner of Nietzsche or Bataille. For someone who was twenty years old shortly after World War II ended, who had not been drawn into the morality of the war, what could politics in fact be when it was a matter of choosing between the America of Truman and the USSR of Stalin? Between the old [French Section of the Workers’ International]³ and Christian Democracy? To become a bourgeois intellectual, a professor, a journalist, a writer, or anything of that sort seemed repugnant. The experience of war had shown us the urgent need of a society radically different from the one in which we were living, this society that had permitted Nazism, that had lain down in front of it, and that had gone over en masse to de Gaulle. A large sector of French youth had a reaction of total disgust toward all that. We wanted a world and a society that were not only different but that would be an alternative version of ourselves: we wanted to be completely other in a completely different world. Moreover, the Hegelianism offered to us at the university, with its model of history’s unbroken intelligibility, was not enough to satisfy us. And the same was true of phenomenology and existentialism, which maintained the primacy of the subject and its fundamental value. Whereas the Nietzschean theme of discontinuity, on the other hand, the theme of an overman who would be completely different from man, and, in Bataille, the theme of limit-experiences through which the subject escapes from itself, had an essential value for us. As far as I was concerned, they afforded a kind of way out between Hegelianism and the philosophical identity of the subject.⁴

The Nietzschean chorus of interruption resounds in Foucault's statement. It is roused by a political malaise against which, in Foucault’s estimation, the then available theories were relatively powerless. At best such theories provide, for him, short term remedies that are finally ineffective; at worst their rationally based remedies might feed the malaise. His famous interview statement concerning Social Darwinism and Nazism is apropos: “One
should not forget—and I’m not saying this in order to criticize rationality, but in order to show how ambiguous things are—it was on the basis of the flamboyant rationality of social Darwinism that racism was formulated, becoming one of the most enduring and powerful ingredients of Nazism. This was, of course, an irrationality, but an irrationality that was at the same time, after all, a certain form of rationality."

These themes of an unbroken historical continuity and subjective primacy, the inherent dangers of them, drive Foucault’s work and are largely responsible for putting him on his philosophic guard throughout his career. The riposte, rooted in Nietzschean genealogy and Heideggerian ontology, is, I trust, familiar: not an unbroken dialectical cacophony of positions continuously reconciled through the march of time; not a present that is animated secretly by predetermined forms of the past; not a discovery of truth that lies at the root of our knowledge and self-knowledge. Foucault’s alternative, a genealogical analysis of decent (Herkunft), distils this quest for seamlessly woven sequences of events and intelligibilities. In the shadow of Hegel—not to revive an imagined supremacy of Kant—something of a transference takes place. Our quested objects are cathected with ideas of noumenality. Overtaken by a desire for intrinsic reality, we demote and to a certain extent ignore the sloppy, phenomenal reality we inadvertently conjure, exist in, know, and value.

A brief disclaimer is in order. Neither Foucault nor Nietzsche would cast their diagnosis in this Kantian light. The portrayal is informed by Lonergan’s diagnostic of a “new immanentism”. This is suggested by the qualification made earlier that Kant’s supremacy is not revived by the alternatives of Nietzsche and Foucault. Even so, the ghost of Kant lingers. The attacks made on Kantian reason intend to overturn its basic assumptions; they do not annihilate or fully exorcise them. Part of the reason is wedded
to the attack itself. Why iron out the wrinkles when the supposed certainty provided by reason is but a function of our desires and needs and not anything intrinsically true? It’s a pragmatic stance that engages basic presuppositions. It leaves the business of recovery to those who believe philosophy can be more than diagnostic, which for Foucault borders on the naïve. This is a sense I would attribute to Fred Lawrence’s observation that “[a]lmost all Continental philosophy and theology take Kant for granted.” They take him for granted in a way that someone like Lonergan cannot who believes philosophy must indeed be more than mere diagnosis. The principle issue for me is one of foundations, which I will get to later.

To return to my outline, Foucault insists that no prescriptive, humanistic philosophy that smacks of Hegelian, Husserlian, or Marxist assumptions guarantees “authentic” knowledge of reality. He opts for a strategy of reading that possesses a keen sense for the messy details. Foucault says this in several places. Ready to hand is an excerpt from the famous essay, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971):

[T]o follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover … the exteriority of accidents.

A couple of years earlier, in his Archaeology of Knowledge (1969), Foucault spells out a rather calculated method for tracking these “faulty calculations”. Not only does his Archaeology underline the fragility of this process, it also renders the commonsense tenor of his earlier comment less bewitching. It is a method, like any other good method, involving a complex set of relations and correlations that yield particular results. In Foucault’s case, the method is for tracking emergence (Entstehung). Emergence is a
Nietzschean term. It signals random occurrence, dispensing with the simple cause-effect relationship between events that voodoo-like hex us into believing that events are somehow destined or necessarily continuous. Obviously, then, the transaction that takes place for genealogy is not attributable to a subject or a collective. For emergence “is a ‘non-place,’ a pure distance, which indicates that the adversaries do not belong to a common space. Consequently, no one is responsible for an emergence; no one can glory in it, since it always occurs in the interstice.”

This question of the spatiality and agency of Entstehung raises important issues with which Foucault grapples especially in his earlier work. They give his hypervigilant strategy the hue one has come to recognize.

The Space of Hypervigilance

The “non-place” of emergence, of history, of anything really, has, like most things, a history. It’s a theme that pervades the writings of Derrida and Foucault. In Derrida we encounter it as chora (“space”), a notion taken from Plato’s Timaeus. Foucault does not, to my knowledge, mention chora by name but his discussion of spatiality ties in nicely with it. More than Derrida Foucault is preoccupied with the occupancy and vacancy of space, a kind of presence-absence I suspect Derrida might want to deconstruct. In any case, Foucault no less than Derrida views “space” as a notional placeholder. As a historian, Foucault naturally fixates on historical positivities. Cautioning about the variety of meanings of the death of God, he makes the following relevant statement—again from an interview (1966):

For Hegel, Reason takes the place of God, and it is the human spirit that develops little by little; for Feuerbach, God is the illusion that alienates Man, but once rid of this illusion, it is Man who comes to realise his liberty; finally, for Nietzsche,
the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty.\textsuperscript{15}

The space remains empty for Foucault too, but it expands and contracts with emergent discursive objects. It is tempting to attach an existential significance to this emptiness. However, the term signals a (desired) obliteration of so-called metanarratives: any discourse that legitimates existing discourses through a particular conceptuality. We saw how for Foucault this means, inter alia, a Hegelian reading of history as “unbroken intelligibility” and what he often calls the sovereign subject and its presumed unquestionable reality. The attempt by modern philosophers to replace the sovereign heavenly lord, which Nietzsche exorcised, with a sovereign human consciousness (read: humanism) is unconvincing for Foucault and is doomed to the same fate as its predecessor.

Structuralism, of course, served as catalyst. It realized, according to Foucault,

\begin{quote}
that all human knowledge, all human existence, all human life, and perhaps even the biological heredity of man, are contained within structures, that is to say within a formal set of elements which obey relations anybody could describe, man ceased, so to speak, to be his own subject, to be simultaneously subject and object. [It is discovered that what makes man possible is in fact a set of structures, structures which he can admittedly, conceive and describe, but of which he is not the subject, or the sovereign consciousness. This reduction of man to the structures within which he is contained seems to me characteristic of contemporary thought. This is why the ambiguity of man as both subject and object no longer now seems to me a fruitful hypothesis, a fruitful theme for research.].\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

What Foucault does judge as fruitful, on the other hand, is a close scrutiny of historical positivities constituted by language, which is to say: not by subjects. This is the warp and woof of genealogy as well as its problematic. As a diagnostic, genealogy is a player in the game of discursive formations. It is guided by the sober judgment that that of which it is a
diagnosis informs the diagnosis itself. No doubt this is why Foucault insists that the role of philosophy is nothing more than diagnosis. One gathers that language is simultaneously our problem and liberator. It is our “problem” in the sense that intelligent beings cannot escape language, used as they are by it. Nevertheless, no problem is said to exist because this is the human condition. The realization is supposed to be both ominous and liberating: we face an abyss free from anxiety about following or concocting a (meta)language that promises liberation. We are freed, in a word, from the tyranny of our self-importance. The impact is somewhat analogous to what occurred when modern science came on the scene.

The space qua abyss forever evicts would-be permanent residents. Prisoners of language, we use language on the one hand to diagnose and critique extant discursive forms and on the other hand to invent and occasion new forms. One might think that this is simply exaggerated belief in language. For Foucault, it is the opposite. He joins the ranks of those who wish to overcome what Nietzsche diagnosed as our “belief in grammar”. The significance of Nietzsche’s statement concerns the ontologizing power of language, that is, that language gives reality to the things we utter. Reality, in this scheme, refers rather to a construction of a particular social arrangement. As a consequence, one finds Foucault tackling every issue strictly socio-historically.17

The greatest buffer of this line of reasoning is the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The vote is often to the least cumbersome belief, opinion, or concept about the way things are. Although phenomenology, particularly Lonergan’s version, is arguably less cumbersome, the premise upon which fundamental ontology and certain forms of poststructuralist theory are based tends to procure greater support. Thus the
Nietzschean stance is tricky to argue against, seeing as the very rules that would allow for judgment have been redefined from the ground up.

For Foucauldians, then, a pressing issue is the diagnosis of language referents, their function and condition of possibility. This is supposed to provide: (1) a handle on the power dynamics of a given discourse; (2) a means by which to disarm their totalistic claims; and (3) a way to eventuate alternatives. Providing for this is the so-called death of God and the death of the subject. The space they once filled is (or ought to remain), one can only presume, “empty”. Thus different languages are able to enter the are(n)a and vie for a hearing. However, because the space is still occupied by discourses that only seem to be open to difference and contradiction and, furthermore, because these discourses often set the agenda, new, preferably subversive languages, are required to insure variation. Because this is so difficult and westerners seem hardwired to think linearly, Foucault enlists “extreme forms of language” that disrupt the process. Bataille’s extravagant thought experiments served as catalyst.

In one particular piece, which is rife with artistic patterning, Foucault works through Bataille’s notion of transgression. Transgression is a pragmatic gesture or action that simultaneously involves and crosses (out) limits—horizons, if you like. As Foucault describes it: “Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes … to experience its positive truth in its downward fall.” Once it does this the transgressive language finds its space only to cross newly instituted boundaries. An important function of transgression, then, is to rupture the limit set by discourses that guard untransgressably limitless concepts. Of relevance here is what Foucault says about
God and the subject, namely, their cultural variability in terms of “death” and the opportunity this presents for a new space:

Not that this death should be understood as the end of his historical reign or as the finally delivered judgement of his non-existence, but as the now constant space of our experience. By denying us the limit of the Limitless, the death of God leads to an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently [Foucault now turns to the death of the subject] to an experience which is *interior and sovereign*. But such an experience for which the death of God is an explosive reality, discloses as its own secret and clarification, its intrinsic finitude, the limitless reign of the Limit, and the emptiness of those excesses in which it spends itself and where it is found wanting … The death of God does not restore us to a limited and positivistic world, but to a world exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by that excess which transgresses it.20

The creative aim is clear. The means to it are equally clear. Foucault rather belligerently describes it as “destroy[ing] syntax”, “shatter[ing] tyrannical modes of speech”, “turn[ing] words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them”.21 Lonergan affords a congenial interpretation of this, on the surface, sheer navel gazing. Like fundamental ontology, genealogy as anti-nihilistic represents a thinking that is experientially artistic. The objective is to get us past our accepted modes of speech into a spatio-temporal place forever future. I will say a little more about this later.22 Where the congeniality breaks down is with the anti-nihilistic form of affirmation. It is a form that breaks with the common view, according to which affirmation is *of* or *toward* some positive content. In contrast the genealogical alternative hypervigilantly “affirms nothing”23 (i.e., not an objectified referent of meaning). Foucault links this to a principle of Maurice Blanchot called “contestation”. Contestation is “a radical break of transitivity.” Nothing negative, it signals an act carrying all existences and values “to their limits and, from there, to the Limit where an ontological decision achieves its end; to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where
being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being. There, at the transgressed limit,” Foucault concludes, “the ‘yes’ of contestation reverberates, leaving without echo the hee-haw of Nietzsche’s braying ass.”

Foucault’s hypervigilant perspectivism harbors a spirit of defiance driven by the belief that an irresolute contestational stance is ineffective against potentially dangerous ideologies and teleologies. This Zarathustrian tenacity is nowhere more relevantly demonstrated than in a 1967 interview with Paolo Caruso entitled “Who are you, Professor Foucault?” Briefly, in the interview Foucault basically rejects the suggestion that genealogy can harbor a form of humanism, in the best possible sense. “I simply say we can seek to define politically, the best conditions for the functioning of society” without appealing to the human.” Things, he continues, simply function. “They function in a very ambiguous way, in order to live but also in order to die, since it is well known that the functioning which makes life possible is a functioning which constantly wears matter out, in such a way that is precisely that which makes possible life which at the time produces death. Species do not function for themselves, nor for man, nor for the greater glory of God; they confine themselves to functioning.”

Part II: A Critical Appraisal
Spacing Differences

While I find certain aspects of Foucault’s hypervigilant strategy laudable, I am nonetheless made wary by it for reasons I like to believe are as valid as those that line Foucault’s circle of reasoning. Our preferences are so closely knotted to our experience that I find it no less dangerous psychologically to dismiss personal experience as to accept everything that informs it. Foucault is very insightful at locating the social conditions that direct the power dynamics of our common consciousness. However, even
he must appeal to personal experience that directs his research choices. “You can never prove a horizon,” Lonergan so wisely said. “You arrive at it from a different horizon, by going beyond the previous one, because you have found something that makes the previous horizon illegitimate.” Foucault has contributed enormously to the negotiation of my own horizon. What has failed to result, however, is the need to jettison every aspect of it. Perhaps this is a required discontinuity whose absence does not make me a very good Foucauldian. In any event, I like to believe we are on a level playing field making horizontal choices, some of the reasons for which we are aware and others of which we are not.

I would like to register my reckless appreciation of genealogical hypervigilance as owing to deep “foundational” differences. The notion is borrowed from Lonergan. In Method foundational reality is equated with religious, moral, and intellectual conversion. Irreconcilable oppositions of a religious, moral, and intellectual nature are rooted in the lack or presence of the relevant conversion. The scope of conversion operates in Lonergan on implicit and explicit levels. Its explicit operation, as coterminous with the expression of foundational reality, reserves, it seems to me, a technical significance to conversion, namely, as a rationally self-conscious activity. Intentionality analysis is offered as the discourse to gauge authentic and inauthentic horizons. The technical sense I wish to attribute to conversion centers on this last point. But as distinct from the expression of foundational reality, the implicit operation of conversion may be seen as pertaining to the negotiation of different horizons and this without an appeal to an “explicit, established, universally recognized criterion of proper procedure.” Lonergan recognizes the possibility for the negotiation of “authentic” being at both levels, although his meta-methodological interests and horizontal commitments favor the more robust
option of intentionality-based conversion. Since my concerns are more general I would like to locate the discussion at the implicit level of foundational negotiation with respect to intellectual and religious horizons.

A Restrictive Intellectual Horizon

Foucault admits a great deal into his horizon and yet his hypervigilance causes him to cancel out equal amounts. At times he is rather eclectic and so will recognize the legitimacy of positions about which he himself prefers to be non-committal. At other times, when provoked by an alternative philosophy, his adamant perspectivism gets the best of him. One of the unsettling consequences is that his discourse takes on a dogmatic air and can be rather limiting.29 Highlighted, too, on account of the growing popularity of holism, is the reductionist tenor of his procedure: things simply function; our role is merely to diagnose how and why. Foucault’s training as a historian and philosopher guides and, at times, even forces the issue. Perhaps he is within his epistemic rights to do so. I mention it here as an example of what impels me to pick and choose with respect to his philosophy.

Intellectually the issue for me hinges on Foucault’s truncated vision, not of intellect per se but of the different experiences of intellect. There are reasons for this, as I have outlined, but I don’t believe such reasons decide the matter. A greater appreciation of other thought forms would remedy the situation. Recently Caputo has almost suggested this very thing. Poststructuralists have basically bypassed mathematical and scientific rationality. What forms their consciousness is far more “political” in nature doused by the concerns of literary-critical and psychoanalytic theories. In response Caputo charitably suggests that Foucault, among others (he names Derrida), has
something to learn from the seriousness with which someone like Lonergan treats mathematics and science. But I am pressed to ask: what? I have an educated guess as to what might be learned as well as a suggestion as to what could be learned.

My hunch as to what might be learned is, admittedly, pessimistic; I take the learning curve to be slight. On a good day Foucault would judge the seriousness exemplified by Lonergan as part of a culturally important social practice that seeks to determine the conditions and the limits of our possible self-knowledge. The knowledge gained, he might continue, is of an order whose emergent reality is decided through its particular enunciative modality. Put more directly, what is perceived to be significant is the social constituents and function of the practice, not any presumed “truth” of its prescriptions. As an alternative Foucault would offer his own strictly diagnostic hermeneutics of the self that “seeks the conditions and the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject, of transforming ourselves.” Foucault’s programmatic of transformation is ostensibly different in that its enunciative modality is strictly diagnostic; it concerns functioning and not the creation of a discourse that appears to legitimate a particular form of functioning. This is on good day! On a bad day, when tested, say, by “the Aristotelian prescription of getting the sceptic to talk,” Foucault would find confirmation of his idea that practices grounded by the type of seriousness exemplified by Lonergan are but a mere rehabilitation of a nineteenth-century “idea of man.” The idea may have a perceived necessary function but, given Foucault’s philosophic horizon, it is incongruous with the claims of the discourse itself.

This kind of predisposition is difficult to argue against phenomenologically. One might poke holes here and there but, unless the paradigm that sustains it shifts, I suspect little will change as a result. Again, this is the hunch I have. What could be learned from
Lonergan, on the other hand, pivots on a horizontal element that Foucault seems almost hardwired to exclude: a multidimensional expansive viewpoint. Foucault doesn’t exclude other viewpoints per se; his scope is truly enormous. However, the elbowroom he grants is circumscribed to a space of functioning that coalesces with the genealogical mien. The heuristic is highly parsimonious, more than Foucault lets on. There is a difference, then, between a heuristic that resolutely guards the indefinite possibilities of transforming the subject (Foucault), and one that masters the various means by which such possibilities become, like it or not, quite definite (Lonergan). The space inhabited by both heuristics is disproportionate, although not necessarily so. A programmatic as Foucault’s is powerful when cognizant of a limit reached by its manner of questioning. It is exceedingly less so when extended to other fields as though decisive or directly pertinent. In this respect the space within which Foucauldian hypervigilance operates is, in my opinion, suffocative and can and often does produce results that it means to impede. As a ruse against what seems familiar and dangerous a hypervigilant strategy may in fact block the way to what is different and liberating. The problem has been properly diagnosed by Fred Lawrence:

The brilliant sensitivity for disjunctions, slippages, and the discontinuous in general can also be used as an excuse for not properly acknowledging higher viewpoints that emerge inasmuch as the mind comes to terms with discontinuities and leaps in being that are not explicable in terms of the logical expansion of the lower viewpoints. 

The space simultaneously tapped into and carved out by Foucault’s transgressive gesture contains a limit that is ignored or discounted because of a well-meaning but finally monochromatic hypervigilance. A broader appreciation of how diverse intelligibilities relate throws into relief this hypervigilant tendency to limit diverse
Intelligibilities to mere functioning and their analysis to mere diagnosis. I agree with Lonergan that the reduction of a potential intelligibility attained by one line of questioning to the limit questions of another amounts to a failure of understanding. Instead of acknowledging an inability to modify an “otherwise coincidental manifold of events”, serviceably reached by genealogy, Foucault precludes the possibility. Genealogical insights are then extended to other forms in order to secure the manifold of events as forever coincidental. The natural outcome is that “intelligibility” is confined to its order of functioning. The fragility of insight is that it can also function as oversight. In the kind of exchange just mentioned the potential for it is high. Remedial would be an understanding of inverse insight.35

Lawrence has made my job immensely simpler by summarizing the key elements that make the horizon entertained by Lonergan’s genetic method different:

Lonergan explains how diverse classical higher viewpoints are related intelligibly, but not logically; and how statistical methods are complementary to classical, as we gradually come to understand concrete states, trends, groups, and populations of beings. If the other happens to be an instance of “systems on the move,” it does no service to reduce the intelligibility proper to genetic method into simply another case of classical intelligibility, thereby obviating intelligible accounts of the continuity-in-discontinuity involved in dynamics of development.36

The contestational dynamic of the Foucauldian horizon is not surprisingly prone to this reduction. I say this because the horizon is one that is fully absorbed by an artistic pattern of reasoning. Briefly, the objective is to lock into a pattern that is experientially “pure”, that is, which excludes alien patterns instrumentalizing experience. The means to it, namely to what Lonergan calls elemental meaning, is through subversive forms of language that distil accepted (now asphyxiated) forms. The dynamism is one in which objectification, representation, is programmatically shunned, all in the name of some
more basic or primordial, spontaneous meaning. This earmarks beautifully, it seems to me, the advances made especially by the early Foucault to radically break with so-called transitivity. I have already discussed its bane. My use for Foucault is therefore selective. I stop where I believe the usefulness of Foucault’s reasoning stops. The potential for greater insight is contained in Foucault’s instantiation of the artistic pattern. The problem is that it is ripe for oversight when excluded from a broader horizon afforded by something like genetic method, which shows greater appreciation for how diverse patterns of experience and their respective contents interrelate. Working out the details is part of my larger project. Because Derrida’s role is pivotal in it, which presents challenges of its own, I hurriedly move to my final point: the absence of the faith horizon.

The Absence of the Faith Horizon

I register this as another element of foundations that almost machine-like forces my selectivity with regard to Foucault.

The so-called “death of God” has been driven down a variety of philosophic paths. In some circles it is a gesture of utmost respect paid to the deity. Caputo is fond of quoting the profound utterance of Meister Eckhart, “I pray God that you rid me of God.” Jean-Luc Marion also enlists the Pseudo-Dionysian gesture as iconoclastic and as a means of making biblical revelation shine. Another notable doing something similar is Gabriel Vahanian whose recent book, Anonymous God (2001), has been described as “a fearless poetic exploration of the utopianism of our humanity in trinitarian terms.” The list can go on. I hazard the guess that while the pattern has mystical underpinnings the thinking is characteristically artistic. The diagnostic of Vahanian’s treatment as a “poetic exploration” is hardly incidental.
The condition of the possibility of the contemporary expression of the death of God was provided for by Nietzsche. Heidegger, of course, gives Nietzsche’s idea an ontological twist with the calculated result that his god-less form of thinking is, as he says, closer to the divine God than ontotheologic would like to admit. Room is made, in other words, whether well furnished or not, for the science of faith.

My point is simply that the empty space Foucault chooses to inhabit, particularly with respect to matters of faith, admits of a richer hue than hypervigilance allows. In no way is this a commentary on the value of Foucault’s work. The quibble is more personal. It comes from an admirer but also (I like to think) person of faith. I can listen to Foucault’s memorial chant cordially from the sidelines. Joining in the chorus, however, is unlikely; the rhythm leaves me cold. But perhaps it is not scholarly fitting to demand more from someone honest enough to assert that his method has little use for faith. “Faith,” Foucault once exclaimed facetiously, “what is that?” Nonetheless, I am addressing the issue of foundations, and Foucault is equally open about the way in which his horizon delimits the relevance of such questions. “The philosopher’s role … perhaps today consists in demonstrating that mankind is starting to discover that it can function without myths. No doubt the disappearance of philosophies and religions would correspond to something of that kind” The remark, though casual, is not incidental. It captures the élan of Foucault’s method, not only as a relevant, focused treatment of religion as “a political force” and “a superb instrument of power for itself”, but also as a means of delimiting relevance to such a focus. The debate is an old one and it appears to be decelerating in religious studies. In this respect the horizon that informs Foucault’s canon of parsimony could use a little spring-cleaning. We may well be advised, of
course, not to expect more from genealogy. However, if the advice is to be effective, it requires wider application. Perhaps genealogy should learn to say less?

The relevance and profundity of Foucault’s horizon for religious faith is an open question. Unless one reduces faith to power, I suspect finding an application beyond the political would be equivalent to finding a needle in a haystack. Like the artistic patterning of radical theology, Foucault’s appropriation of the death of God protracts the non-objectifying gesture. Unlike radical theology, Foucault’s rejection of ontotheologic entails, it seems to me, the reduction of profundity to artistry. Incidentally, I am not convinced that perpetually pushing the envelope is always constructive or sustainable intellectually, let alone psychologically. At any rate, the horizon nestling radical theologies really does seem quite different from its Foucauldian cousin. Tempting is a congenial comparison to Buddhism which rejects metaphysical speculation about God as anything more than potentially insightful for moral instruction.\(^47\) Anatman, the idea of “no self,” also bears relevance. Although I am not committed to Lonergan’s broad characterization of Christian and Buddhist mysticism in terms of theistic and atheistic counterparts, I nonetheless find his comparison of their potential for dialogue qua mystical patterns key to understanding the difference between the Buddhist horizon and Foucault’s own.\(^48\) While expressions of the Buddhist and Foucauldian “movement to the unknown” may be similar in that they are both examples of non-theistic unobjectified experience, I have my doubts that I will come across any time soon the suggestion that Foucault’s articulation approximates Buddhist religious orthopraxy.\(^49\) The absence of the suggestion indirectly corroborates my commonplace claim that these worldviews are dominated by qualitatively distinct patterns of experience. Their overlap is misunderstood when fixating on the coincidental similarities of their content and not on the particular
rhythm of their gesture. As a westerner and one who, like Lonergan, gravitates to the
personalistic interpretation of mystical experience, I believe a complementarity can exist
not only between personalistic objectified mystical experience and non-personalistic
unobjectified mystical experience, but also, less obviously, between personalistic
mystical experience (whether objectified or not) and unobjectified experience of the
artistic order. Such an achievement is far more difficult than it sounds. Nevertheless, its
possibility is afforded more by genetic method than one will find in genealogy alone

Faith may indeed be the centered act required to negotiate an ever precarious
equilibrium. Without faith, the world is too evil to be good, to paraphrase Lonergan.\(^{50}\)
Without faith, the night of hypervigilance appears perpetually dense, even if one can hear
peals of laughter echoing in it.\(^{51}\) As a centered act, faith provides for the salutary
functioning of creative and healing development. By it the propensity to be hyper-vigilant
can accede to moments of relief through insight and grace. But this is to discuss in the
order of Hare’s blik.\(^{52}\) What is interesting about bliks is that they sustain but do not
consist in philosophic assertions or systems of them. Although “it is very important to
have the right blik”, rarely is the way to it through philosophic argumentation. And so it
might be prudent to stop here.

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1 John D. Caputo, Forward to In Deference to the Other: Lonergan and Contemporary Continental
2 J. Bernauer, Michel Foucault’s Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought (Atlantic Highlands, NJ:
   For more see Michel Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, selected and edited by J.R. Carrette
3 SFIO: Section française d’internationale ouvrière.
5 M. Foucault, Power, 358
6 Heidegger’s influence on Foucault is often eclipsed by the Nietzsche connection. However, Foucault
   himself notes that Heidegger had a determinative impact on him: “My entire philosophic development was
determined by my reading of Heidegger. My knowledge of Nietzsche is certainly better than my knowledge
of Heidegger. Nevertheless, these are the two fundamental experiences I have had. It is possible that if I
had not read Heidegger, I would not have read Nietzsche. I had tried to read Nietzsche in the fifties but Nietzsche alone did not appeal to me—whereas Nietzsche and Heidegger: that was a philosophical shock!” (Foucault as quoted in Niel Levy, Being Up-To-Date: Foucault, Sartre, and Postmodernity [New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001] 28).


8 For a more detailed treatment of this argument, see Kanaris, “To Whom Do We Return in the Turn to the Subject? Lonergan, Derrida, and Foucault Revisited,” in In Deference to the Other: Lonergan and Contemporary Continental Thought, 33-52.

9 See the famous passages from The Gay Science, ¶110-111.

10 See Michel Foucault, “Who Are You, Professor Foucault?” in Michel Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 91, 96-7.

11 Fred Lawrence, “Lonergan’s Postmodern Subject: Neither Neoscholastic Substance nor Cartesian Ego,” in In Deference to the Other, 118, n. 4.


13 Foucault, The Foucault Reader, 85.


15 Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 85

16 Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 93.

17 See, for example, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 298, where he attributes the belief to a practice at the end of the eighteenth century, a major concern of which was to fix the frontiers of knowledge. He then further roots the belief to the practice of Port-Royal grammarians in the seventeenth century. Theirs was a concern to grant their mode of inquiry the status of a science, “the objectivizing of the speaking subject” (Foucault, Power, 326).

18 A case in point is an early statement by Foucault that “dialectics took the place of the questioning of being and limits the play of contradiction and totality” (Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 63). The way dialectics does this is by viewing contradiction as a necessary byproduct of the developing spirit. It limits the play, not simply by eradicating contradiction by Aufhebungen. For developing spirit sublates, incorporates, the contradiction qua contradiction. But it limits it by viewing it as necessary for developing reason; it sees it as a necessary reasonability. Contradiction is something that comes under the categories of knowledge. In this way contradiction is managed and made manageable by the totalizing development of spirit, rationality.

19 Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 60.

20 Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 59.

21 Foucault, The Order of Things, 298.


23 Foucault, Religion and Culture, 61.

24 Foucault, Religion and Culture, 62. The reference to Nietzsche’s braying ass, a post-and anti-nihilistic gesture, is to Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Part Four, “The Awakening.”


27 In chapter 11 of Method in Theology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) Lonergan discusses, accordingly, the issue of conversion vis-à-vis the authentic functioning of the mediating and mediated phases of functional specialization. I wish to discuss the matter of conversion more generally here with reference to, though bracketing, intentionality analysis.

28 Lonergan, Method in Theology, 268.


30 Caputo, “Foreword,” in In Deference to the Other, xi.

31 Foucault, Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, 4, n. 4.

I use “expansive viewpoint” to avoid imagined evaluative connotations attached to the term “higher” in Lonergan’s appellation.


To name only a few: Edmond Jabes, Immanuel Levinas, Paul van Buren, Thomas J.J. Altizer, William Hamilton, and Hans Urs Von Balthasar.

Lonergan captures nicely the moral significance of Nietzsche’s observation: “[T]he fundamental idea … is that God is dead, in the sense that he is not living in the minds and hearts of people in the nineteenth and twentieth century: not as God of people of culture in the nineteenth century, and not as god of the general population today. Because God is dead, because he is not a force in human living, the whole morality that Western culture has inherited from Christianity has lost its foundation, and we have to think out a new morality” (*Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, vol. 18 of *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Philip J. McShane [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001] 231).


Foucault, *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault*, 103.


For examples of contemporary sociologists of religion whose work may not be as exhilarating as Foucault’s but are nonetheless more circumspect in this regard, see the works of Ronald L. Johnstone and Robert Bellah.


See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 117: “Without faith, without the eye of love, the world is too evil for God to be good, for a good God to exist.”

For an analysis of the various nuances of “postmodern” laughter, see Ronald H. McKinney, “Lonergan and the Ambiguity of Postmodern Laughter,” in *In Deference to the Other*, 141-64