Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations

Philosophy 157
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The Sterility of Polemics

- Polemics is theater, though with consequences
- No new ideas can come out of it
- It does not advance toward the truth
- If one side is given absolute power, it will wipe the other out

Polemics

- Polemics are opposed to the open give-and-take of question and answer
- Foucault prefers the latter, as respecting the autonomy of both sides, while imposing a discipline as well
- The polemicist possesses the privileges in advance —a right to wage war
- He abolishes the other as a subject
- Polemics is a hindrance to truth

Problemization

- Foucault does not attempt a critique that rejects all possible solutions but the correct one
- With problems such as madness, criminality, or sexuality, there likely is none
- Foucault's role is to pose these problems to politics, not to describe them in terms of existing political theory
- This does not depend on a pre-existing consensus, but it can create a temporary consensus

Models of Polemics

- The religious model: uncovering the point of dogma neglected by the opponent
- The judiciary model: allowing no possibility of equal discussion, but imposing a judgment
- The political model: establishes the other as an enemy who must be vanquished
- The political model is the most powerful

Ethics, Politics, Knowledge

- Foucault is not trying to analyze the relation between these three as such
- Instead, he tries to see how they build on one another in specific cases, with emphasis on one or another of them
- Madness: knowledge, a game of truth
- Criminality: politics, relations of power
- Sexuality: ethics, forms of relation to one's self and others

History of Problematics

- Foucault was looking for a history of thought different from one of ideas or of attitudes
- Thought is what allows us to be critical
- It allows us to question the meaning, conditions, goals of conduct
- In this way, thought is freedom
- It is an original response to difficulties
- Multiple responses usually arise

The Method

- Looking at problemization is not deconstruction
- It looks at specific problems
- It investigates solutions, and how those solutions arose from the way the problems are posed
- Problemization is not an arrangement of representations, but a work of thought