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**Chosen Topic:** nr. 2

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*To a wise man the whole world is open. For the whole cosmos is the fatherland of a good soul*  
– Democritus of Abdera

Through History, certain men and women have been considered “wise”. Before Christ, Socrates was said, by the oracle of Delphi, to be the wisest man in Greece, though he, himself, continuously stated that he didn’t know anything. Later in History, particularly in the middle ages, the priests, pope and religious consortium were considered to be holders of the truth, able to give you salvation and thereby also considered to be the wisest of people. These days, or, more appropriately perhaps, in the last 300 years, politicians, doctors, experts, the government etc. have been and are considered by many to be (or should be) the wisest since they are the ones making decisions regarding the society in which we live. But we must ask ourselves if these people actually are wise, what a wise man is, and perhaps more importantly: If wisdom or even the whole world exists on a foundation of goodness.

This essay is not going to tell you who or what should be considered wise. Neither is it going to tell you what is good and what is wrong. This essay’s aim is to contradict Democritus’ quote; to try to destroy your perception of what is wise and what is good, if anything at all even is to be considered to be so. And definitely, it is going to tell you, that the world isn’t, under any circumstances, open or free. In this approach to the subject, Michel Foucault will be the primary reference.

Trying to follow Foucault thoroughly throughout this essay, my existence as the author of this essay is to be destroyed, and I will not, like Foucault won’t, claim that I own what I’ve written. As Foucault states: “What does it matter who speaks?” We are in general convinced that there is a more or less wise talking subject behind the texts we read, but Foucault states otherwise: The author is simply a mechanism of the respective discourse which amalgamates certain parts of the whole sum of knowledge of the respective historical epoch – the discourse. The author can have another function as well, but that will be explained later.

The above section needs an explanation, and I will explain more general Foucaultan view points before returning to the problem with the term ‘author’. You probably remember the story about Pinocchio; the boy made out of tree who “comes to life” – believes that he is a real boy – but really, he is a marionette controlled by a person who makes Pinocchio do whatever he wants him to do. What I want you to do is to try to imagine that you, as you are reading this essay, is completely controlled like Pinocchio; that it is a total illusion that you have a choice and more importantly that it is an illusion that you even have an independent “self”, or “soul” if you like. Foucault claims that the subject is dead, so to speak, and that the soul is the prison of the body. The body is tabula rasa, and by different structures and mechanisms, tabula rasa is filled with elements from the discourse and what you believe is

your “self” is created. Thus are you beginning to undergo what Foucault calls objectification and subjectification. Already now we are perhaps able to see, if following what has been explained so far, that Democritus’ quote is slowly being dissolved.

Returning to Pinocchio, he is, as mentioned, controlled by a person (an individual) and thus has he what we call power over Pinocchio. What Foucault states is that different structures of power constantly flourish between individuals, one could here make a perspective to Nietzsche’s idea concerning that people always aim to exert their power over ours, but according to Foucault, the overriding and predominant power is only “held” by the discourse. Well, it is actually wrong to say that the power is “held”. According to Foucault power can’t be overtaken, held, shared etc. “Power” is just a name for an extremely complex societal situation consisting of constant activity and displacements caused by counter-power activities among other things. The discourse is not to be connected with any individual, it is perhaps non-personal, but could actually be called over-personal since it is controlling everything that we “know” as personal.

Now, of course the so far introduced thoughts need more investigation, but it should be fairly possible already to begin the contradiction of Democritus’ quote. Following Foucault, one could now state: A wise man’s thoughts are never free, therefore it would be ridiculous to call him “wise”, and the world is never open since ruled only by the non-personal or over-personal discourse. The term “good”, or a good soul, isn’t absolute, for nothing is absolute, nor natural, (cf. Foucault) and therefore “good’s” existence is doubtable as well as the existence of a so called soul isn’t something transcendent, which we tend to believe it is, but both and only a product and tool of the discourse’s power and “will” and to maintain itself.

Before continuing, I must warn you and tell you that I, as well as Foucault, is very much aware that any opponent of this philosophical movement would say that the writer (Foucault) is, of course, just as predetermined, defined, objectified, subjectified and so on as everybody else. It is, undoubtedly a flaw in Foucault’s philosophy, but in order to justify his own philosophical work, he introduces the earlier mentioned word “counter-power”. Counter-power causes cracks in the discourse and displacement which forces some groups to dissolve and others to emerge. The counter-power process is often unconscious and examples of counter-power could be feminism, opposition-groups against the surveillance-society, Afro-Americans who first is discriminated by the white people using the word “nigger” and later begin to use the word themselves as a friendly gesture and thereby are diverting power etc. The author-“mechanism” can, however, unlike what was written on the first page, also create counter-power: Foucault obviously believes that our language is a product of the discourse, but he also believes that it is possible to use the discourse’s own creations “against” it (cf. later – the discourse *needs* counter-power). When a writer writes poetry for example, her or his use of words aren’t necessarily alike the use of the words we use in our daily lives. Therefore, through poetry (and authors), the discourse’s power can be diverted. The problem is, however, if the power can be diverted in a way that is beneficial to the people who is, nonetheless, still said to be defined by the discourse. Foucault doesn’t believe that there is a natural (since nothing is natural) progression towards anything “better” or utopian; nothing gets better, nothing gets wiser. So what is the point of counter-power according to Foucault?

Change? Diversity? I must say, that it isn't completely convincing. What is the point in change when we can't change anything for the better? ... (These last couple of lines concerning Foucault can be seen as a critique of Karl Marx who believes the society naturally is progressing towards the socialistic state. Foucault has actually been called an anti-Marxist, but that is, however, inappropriate when considering how Foucault fights bravely in order not to be categorized.) Following Foucault, I *do* believe there is a fair answer to the question about change: The "power", or discourse, has to both maintain and **expand** itself and therefore it finds a lot a mechanisms which first can be misunderstood as bad for the discourse but eventually is beneficial.

### *Régime du Savoir*

Foucault does believe that that the power itself breeds counter-power and persons which in our discourse will be defined as incongruous, bizarre or perverted and therefore make perfect examples of what is not accepted; what is wrong and bad. Examples could be a pedophile, a criminal or a mad man. This way, the discourse is more capable of its continuous controlling of the individuals since they are now aware of how "not to be" (really = how the power/discourse doesn't "want" them to be). The power's "agency" or "priesthood" today is for example doctors, psychologist, health experts, politicians, police etc. who define the subject, makes it an issue which needs treatment, tell you what is good or bad and so on. Foucault is after all a genealogist and has therefore examined History: In the Middle Ages, the power's "priesthood" *was* the actual priesthood (and that is the reason of its name; obviously). In the religious consortiums hey days, they demanded the sinner's "mind" on a plate; its deepest secrets, its wrong-doings, lusts etc. This was done through confessions as we know them from the Catholic Church. In return, the "sinners" were granted salvation. Of course, Foucault is convinced that this "salvation" never existed – the whole thing was a set-up to gain what the discourse wanted.

This is getting a bit abstract and I want to clear a few things out: First of all, it might be wrong to "personalize" the discourse/power with words such as "wants", "gains", "controls" etc. but they are simply used due to lack of better words.

Returning to today's priesthood, Foucault's analyses actually points out that the exact same thing is taking place today – just in another shape: We serve our minds to the psychologists, do what the politicians say and what the government wants (of course, the incongruous people are there, but they already have a part to play), and what do we get? We get happiness and a state of wealth! But these thing are, to Foucault, just as fictive as the salvation granted in the middle ages. Another instrument of power is the family as an institution: here we have surveillance, "crime" and punishment = a mini-state and thus do people begin to watch over themselves.

These thoughts are very much like Bentham's idea regarding the architecture of a prison: Panopticon. The idea of panopticon is a round building in which a "tower" is placed in the middle from where the prison guard *can* watch over the prisoners any time he likes. The actual "brilliance" of the idea, however, is that the prisoner does not know when or whether he/she is being watched or not. The guard can look at the prisoner, but the prisoner can't see the guard due to light regulations. The deal with Bentham's panopticon is, that the prisoner eventually "watches" himself. One could compare this to George Orwell's 1984 where the Party is using surveillance methods very much alike panopticon.

Régime du savoir is no cosmos. We can't trust anyone and perhaps especially not ourselves. Even our deepest thoughts are being controlled by the "priesthood" who is controlled by the discourse. Nothing is sacred, least of all our soul.

I would like to show you an example which shows the effectiveness of régime du savoir (the regime of knowledge) and a synchronized objectification and subjectification process: In 1794, a priest were ridiculed, tortured and put in chains because he were absolutely certain that he was Jesus Christ. The pioneering doctor Pinel released the mad priest from his physical chains, diagnosed him mentally ill and put him in an institution. Now, being in the psychical chains just strengthened the mad priest's belief's concerning him being the suffering Christ. Pinel's releasing him isolated him, dissolved him and bound him to himself at the same time, and not least: made him feel shame and humiliation – The Fall (from Eden.) He has thus become subject to the régime du savoir and is useful as the "bad" example of what is abnormal.

Last, I'd like to make a new quote inspired by Foucault which contradicts Democritus: *The "wise" man is the blindest of them all, for he is ruled not only by a discourse, but mostly by his own beliefs which silently dissolves him and closes his blackening world around him as he unknowingly subjugates every other person, whose knowledge span in dimmer. And all this in the name of the fatherland: the soulless, sizzling power.*