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Clausewitz Upside Down? Politics and War in the "Hidden Dialogue" between Raymond Aron and Michel Foucault

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the "hidden dialogue" between Raymond Aron and Michel Foucault around the Clausewitzian formula —according to which war is the continuation of politics by other means—and its possible inversion. Drawing on recently published primary sources, including transcriptions of their Collège de France courses, the article shows how both thinkers, working in parallel without explicit mutual engagement, devoted sustained attention in the early 1970s to the paradigm of war as a lens for analysing politics. Aron, rejecting any inversion of the formula, defended a conception of politics as irreducibly bound up with the quest for legitimate authority, against what he termed the "false realism" of Pareto, Morgenthau, and Niebuhr. Foucault, by contrast, elaborated under Nietzsche's influence a "polemocritical schema" that employs war as a grid of intelligibility for power relations—a schema shaped, as archival research demonstrates, by a silent confrontation with Schmitt's *Begriff des Politischen*. Both trajectories, despite their profound divergence, belong to a heterodox form of political realism critical of positivist and evolutionary variants alike.

Abstract (Italiano)

L'articolo ricostruisce il "dialogo nascosto" tra Raymond Aron e Michel Foucault attorno alla formula clausewitziana—secondo cui la guerra è la continuazione della politica con altri mezzi—e alla sua possibile inversione. Sulla base di fonti primarie recentemente pubblicate, tra cui le trascrizioni dei rispettivi corsi al Collège de France, l'articolo mostra come entrambi i pensatori, lavorando in parallelo senza alcun confronto esplicito, abbiano dedicato nei primi anni Settanta un'attenzione sistematica al paradigma della guerra come strumento per analizzare la politica. Aron, rifiutando qualsiasi inversione della formula, difende una concezione della politica come irriducibilmente legata alla ricerca dell'autorità legittima, contro quello che egli definisce il "falso realismo" di Pareto, Morgenthau e Niebuhr. Foucault elabora invece, sotto l'influenza di Nietzsche, uno

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"schema polemocritico" che impiega la guerra come griglia di intellegibilità delle relazioni di potere—uno schema plasmato, come dimostrano ricerche archivistiche, da un confronto silenzioso con il *Begriff des Politischen* di Schmitt. Entrambe le traiettorie, pur profondamente divergenti, appartengono a una forma eterodossa di realismo politico critica tanto delle varianti positivistiche quanto di quelle evoluzionistiche.

Keywords: *Clausewitz, Foucault, Aron, war/politics*

1. "Bosses, it's war!"

In the aftermath of the "Corso Traiano uprising"—the day-long confrontation on 3rd July 1969 during which Fiat workers in Turin engaged in what was effectively an urban guerrilla battle against the police—the Maoist newspaper *La Cause du Peuple* urged the French to follow the example of their Italian comrades. The wildcat strikes, the demand for wage increases decoupled from productivity, the extension of the conflict from the factory to the "factory-city," and other news coming from Italy clearly signalled, in the editors' view, that the ongoing confrontation differed substantially from earlier labour disputes and represented, in many respects, a qualitative leap that could no longer be ignored. The very headline—"Bosses, it's war!"—announced an imminent intensification of the conflict, and the paper did not hesitate to issue a warning to the "riffraff" on the opposing side: "they will have war, because they are looking for it. And they won't even need to declare it; the workers and students have already begun" (*La Cause du Peuple*, 1971: 85). A few weeks later, the two editors of the Maoist newspaper were arrested and put on trial precisely because of that headline. The direction of the paper was then entrusted to Jean-Paul Sartre, who had already been for years the editor of *Les Temps Modernes* (itself having shifted markedly to the far left). Although Sartre did not entirely share the newspaper's political line, he accepted the role enthusiastically—partly because his own reading of the French conjuncture closely resembled that of the young Maoist intellectuals. In an interview broadcast by a German radio station, given together with André Glucksmann—then one of the leading figures of the French Maoist movement—Sartre declared to the journalist: "France is in struggle.

We are heading toward a form of civil war. [...] *Temps Modernes* explains the reasons why we are sliding toward civil war, but these explanations mean nothing unless one openly takes sides" (*La Cause du Peuple*, 1971: 173).

The belligerent language employed by *La Cause du Peuple* and Sartre's alarmed assessment were far from exceptional in the climate of the time. After the French May and the Italian Hot Autumn, it had in fact become common for far-left organisations, when referring to the ongoing confrontation and its possible trajectories, to draw upon expressions such as "civil war," "people's war," and "protracted war"—terms largely borrowed from guerrilla movements in the Global South and, in particular, from Maoist texts. Often these expressions were used metaphorically, and "civil war" merely denoted an intense social conflict punctuated by episodes of violence. In other cases, however, the usage was not merely rhetorical; for instance, Glucksmann argued that the mobilisation should lead, after a phase of "ideological revolution," to a genuine "armed struggle" (*La Cause du Peuple*, 1971: 177).

It was likely due to the habitual recourse to bellicose language on the part of the *gauche* and its intellectuals that Karl von Clausewitz's celebrated "Formula"—according to which war is a "continuation of politics by other means"—came to occupy a central place in the courses that Raymond Aron and Michel Foucault taught for several years at the Collège de France. Quite strikingly, and without any apparent connection between their respective analyses, both devoted a number of lectures to various aspects of war, civil war, and revolution. Following markedly divergent paths and ultimately reaching sharply opposed conclusions, each of them also examined the possibility of inverting the Prussian general's Formula: both Aron and Foucault considered the hypothesis that it might instead be politics which ought to be understood as the continuation of war "by other means," rather than vice versa, as Clausewitz had maintained (Guareschi, 2010).

This intertwined reflection on the Clausewitzian Formula and its possible inversion never took the form of an explicit confrontation between their respective positions, nor did either of them, at any point, invoke the arguments of the other. Yet the availability today of the complete transcriptions of Foucault's Collège de France

courses, as well as of several of Aron's—most notably that of the 1973 course *Théorie de l'action politique* (Aron, 2023c)—allows us to reconstruct this "hidden dialogue" in a more systematic fashion and to discern some of its theoretical implications[1]. The aim of the present review—dedicated to recent studies and to the republication of long-unavailable texts—is not to suggest implausible convergences or to posit implicit influences that readers of Aron and Foucault might somehow have failed to notice until now. The planes on which Aron and Foucault elaborated their reflections in their Collège lectures are, in truth, far too distant for any real reciprocal influence to be hypothesized. Rather, a careful reading of their respective trajectories through the lens of Clausewitz's Formula suggests that Aron's and Foucault's paths—at least in the early 1970s—were less distant than they have often appeared. Moreover, both trajectories seem, in some admittedly remote sense, to belong to the broader family of political realism, even if—in Foucault's case above all—these amounts to a decidedly heterodox form of realism. It is, however, precisely this heterodoxy that renders it capable of offering valuable insights for a renewed critical engagement with the realist tradition.

2. When Does War Begin?

After joining the Collège de France in 1970, Aron began to articulate more fully a long-standing project: a systematic reinterpretation of Clausewitz's works. He thus devoted three separate courses to the Prussian general in the first half of the 1970s. The first, delivered in 1971–1972, was explicitly devoted to *Carl von Clausewitz and His Times*; the second, offered in 1972–1973, bore the rather generic title *Theory of Political Action*; and the third, *Games and Stakes of Politics*, was held in 1973–1974. In these latter two courses, Clausewitz's thought served less as the explicit object of Aron's inquiry than as an analytical instrument through which the French intellectual sought to reconstruct the inner logic of political

[1] The expression "hidden dialogue" is borrowed here from Meier (1995), who used it to refer to the silent dialogue that Leo Strauss maintained with Carl Schmitt's thought after leaving Germany, as well as to the (never acknowledged) influence that Strauss himself exerted on Schmitt.

action—an intention evident in the lectures delivered in early 1973, recently published in Italian translation by Alessandro Campi and Giulio De Ligio (Aron, 2023c). Aron's investigations would then culminate in *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, a substantial two-volume treatise devoted, respectively, to *L'âge européen* and *L'âge planétaire*: first published in France in 1976 (Aron, 1976), later translated into English in 1983, and recently reissued under the title *Clausewitz: Philosopher of War* (Aron, 2023a).

In the *Theory of Political Action* course, delivered in early 1973, several passages made explicit Aron's intention to undertake a comprehensive reconsideration of Clausewitz's thought. He was convinced that the general had not had the time to complete a thorough revision of his early theses in light of reflections that Aron believed essential—particularly for rescuing *Vom Kriege* from readings that had turned it into a celebration of the war of annihilation. Although Aron's interest in Clausewitz was by then longstanding, the specific focus of the 1973 course was undoubtedly shaped by the political climate of the time, especially by the widespread use of the rhetoric of civil war—of which the proclamations of *La Cause du Peuple* were only one among many examples. That rhetoric frequently invoked Clausewitz's Formula not in reference to conventional warfare, but to revolution, conceived as a "protracted war" within society: a war understood as an extended conflict in which the distinction between war and peace collapsed, thereby allowing the inversion of Clausewitz's Formula so that politics appeared as the continuation of war "by other means." Although Aron had little sympathy for the Maoist *gauche*, he chose to dedicate the 1973 course precisely to revolutionary action. The idea had likely been prompted by Mao's own use of the Clausewitzian Formula—an interpretation that appeared to Aron diametrically opposed to that embraced by the far left and its intellectuals (cf. Palano, 2025).

A central thread running through the course concerned the demarcation between war in the strict sense—war fought between two sovereign political entities—and civil war, that is, conflict internal to a political entity and waged among members of the same community. The former aimed merely at defeating an adversary, whereas the latter—even when assuming the form of revolution—was always oriented toward the conquest of legitimate power over a territory

and its population. Moreover, Aron insisted that not every form of conflict could be defined as "war," and that one must not confuse the exercise of physical violence with "symbolic violence" or with forms of manipulation involving coercive measures. This, in Aron's view, was precisely the error committed by many radical theorists—from Herbert Marcuse to Pierre Bourdieu (who had worked with Aron during his years at the Sorbonne)—who tended to portray the condition of subordination experienced by the lower classes in advanced capitalist societies as the effect of a sort of war. Here, again, Aron invoked Mao's lesson: following Clausewitz faithfully, Mao had insisted on maintaining a strict distinction between war and revolution, and hence between war and politics (to which war remained, in any case, subordinate) (Aron, 2023c).

In *Penser la guerre, Clausewitz*, Aron would reaffirm this conviction, arguing that any inversion of the Formula ultimately blurred two planes that had to be kept rigorously separate. One had to continue to conceive war as the "continuation of politics by other means," for only such a formulation made it possible to recognise the structural distinction between interstate and intrastate politics. Aron emphasised that a similar confusion had already misled Ludendorff, who in the 1930s had invoked the idea of total war. Yet Aron was even more concerned with the post-1945 expansion of the concept of war—particularly in the context of the confrontation between the communist and Western blocs, increasingly interpreted as the global extension of class struggle, a perspective that emerged during the Korean War and would dominate the ensuing decades (Aron, 2023a: 313).

The position articulated in Aron's 1973 course at the Collège de France had, in fact, surfaced on several earlier occasions in his writings. To some extent, it was already discernible in the course *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*—also recently republished under the new title *Aron critique de Sartre*—originally derived from a series of lectures Aron had devoted, a few years earlier, to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, written by his former companion at the École Normale (Aron, 2025a). Entering into the philosophical system Sartre had elaborated in his attempt to fuse phenomenology and Marxism, Aron sought to expose the contradiction at its core: a system that, on the one hand, affirmed the centrality of individual

freedom, and on the other, adopted a Marxian conception of history as the product of conflict between collective entities. Faced with this tension, Aron argued, Sartre ultimately transformed violence into the foundation of the process of social transformation.

A first line of criticism targeted Sartre's implicit "naturalisation" of conflict—his suggestion that the struggle for scarce resources constituted the fundamental precondition of all conflict. But Aron's critique could not avoid turning to Sartre's notion of the "group-infusion": the collective that, according to Sartre, makes any form of collective action possible, and that subsequently becomes an organisation and then an institution, thereby losing its original characteristics. Aron criticised several aspects of Sartre's argument. One was the idea that history is made by collective subjects—unitary entities endowed (at least ostensibly) with a will of their own—within which individual freedom, which Sartre had nonetheless deemed crucial, is ultimately absorbed. A further limitation, however, lay in the implicit determinism of Sartre's conception of historical process, reduced to a single causal mechanism—violence—with the evident risk of producing a monocausal explanation incapable of grasping the plurality of forces at work in the social realm.

Against Sartre's philosophy, in which "creative violence" functions as the pivot around which the entire course of history turns, Aron defended the necessity of conceiving politics not only as conflict but also as the peaceful management of conflict, and as a domain that may arise not only from the struggle over scarce resources but also from the pursuit of cooperation. In one of the most incisive passages of the book, when summarising the arguments developed in his examination of Sartre's positions, Aron focused in particular on the absence, in Sartre's theory of founding violence, of any notion of secondary legitimacy—one that did not consist solely in the original act that marks the birth of the group. Both Sartre and Rousseau (Aron, 2025a: 342-344).

In the critique of Sartre and of his exaltation of violence as the origin of the group, it is not difficult to discern the traces of the criticism that Aron had directed—albeit never in a fully systematic fashion—towards the thought of Carl Schmitt for more than half a century. In that case as well, he regarded as reductive any attempt to circumscribe the political phenomenon exclusively within the friend–enemy

opposition. Yet some aspects of his critique of Sartre also underpinned the deep-seated diffidence Aron maintained toward political realism, or at least toward certain strands of that tradition.

3. Against "False Realism"

Although he shared some "family traits" with the realist tradition, Aron consistently distanced himself from its more orthodox variants. As many scholars of his work have noted, while he was undoubtedly close to political realism, they have also—almost without exception—underscored his highly critical relationship with its most well-known formulations and several of its underlying assumptions (Adair-Toteff, 2018; Campi, 2005, 2015; De Ligio, 2007, 2018; Molina, 2013; Panebianco, 2025).

This point is made particularly clear in Agostino Carrino's recent intellectual profile of Aron. As Carrino observes, Aron's critical method was "largely indebted [...] in philosophy to Kant and Dilthey, and in sociology to Max Weber—with Weber's rejection of monocausal explanations; and, in political science, to Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Tocqueville, and Pareto." Above all, it entailed the "rejection of reductionism, of methodological syncretism, which leads one to justify one type of analysis—economic analysis—with arguments of a moral nature" (Carrino, 2023: 43–44). This did not mean, of course, that moral considerations were irrelevant to politics; rather, Aron sought to grasp the full complexity of reality, distancing himself both from Marxist determinism and the various philosophies of history, and from what he regarded as the monocausalism of "false realism" (Carrino, 2023: 73–75).

Among the elements Aron partially accepted from the most orthodox versions of realism, the principal ones concerned the two components that mark the "negative anthropology" of orthodox realism: on the one hand, the idea of a human nature that remains invariant across time; on the other, a radically pessimistic view of that same nature. From this standpoint, the French scholar was not entirely impervious to the theses advanced, for example, by Konrad Lorenz's comparative ethology (Aron, 1968: 47–49). On several occasions he referred to the notion of an invariant "human nature," as

in *La révolution introuvable*, where, responding to Alain Duhamel's questions about the aspirations animating the student revolt, he observed: "there is no evidence that violence can lead to a total pacification (which in any case I do not consider compatible with human nature)" (Aron, 1968: 119).

Yet in his theoretical writings he never ascribed major analytical significance to such an anthropological premise. While he occasionally affirmed the existence of an invariant human nature—in tension with the aspiration to eliminate conflict from history—he consistently avoided adopting a "one-dimensional anthropology" centred exclusively on aggressive impulses or the pursuit of power. In the 1973 course, at the end of the final lecture, he returned to this point, remarking that "man is violent, but not only in the way animals are," for he is violent "also through faith and refusal" (Aron, 2023c: 327). The reference to "faith" and "refusal," which closed the 1972–73 course, was anything but incidental. For it was precisely the importance he attributed to such elements that led Aron to consider the realism of some of the leading figures of international-relations realism overly simplistic. Referring to Hans J. Morgenthau and Reinhold Niebuhr, he noted how their perspective was flattened onto a single dimension—the pursuit of power—while failing to perceive the rest. "Obsessed with the need to refute contractarian philosophy, the liberal doctrine according to which the *homo politicus* could be disciplined only through respect for law and morality," Aron wrote, "the realists end up opposing one anthropology to another, and power to law (or morality)" (Aron, 1970: 677).

In essence, Aron argued, the principal limitation of the international-relations realism of Morgenthau and Niebuhr lay in their assumption that the motivations of political communities and statesmen did not undergo significant transformations over the course of history, and were thus unaffected by ideologies, regime type, or cultural context. For Aron, the root of this distortion lay in the belief that anthropological characteristics were fixed once and for all, thereby determining the decisions of statesmen. "By conflating, for lack of a rigorous distinction, the eternal traits and the historical particularities of international politics," Aron observed, "realist theory and praxeology have ended up becoming an ideology comparable to the one they sought to combat" (Aron, 1970: 682). "True

realism"—that which "takes the whole of reality into account"—must instead adapt itself "not to a portrait of what international politics would be if statesmen were wisely egoistic, but to what it actually is, with the passions, follies, ideas, and violences of the century" (Aron, 1970: 682–83).

According to Aron, the fundamental problem was that cynical realism refused, *on principle*, to recognise that "political and moral ideas," which analysts must take into account when comparing different regimes—and particularly when contrasting democratic and totalitarian regimes—"are always part of reality itself" (Aron, 1969: 24). The realist who saw politics solely as the pursuit of power thus revealed himself to be merely a "false realist," incapable of perceiving the complexity of a far more articulated world. Above all, he forgot that politics, in addition to being marked by the struggle for power, is above all the sphere in which one struggles for "legitimate" power—something not reducible to mere coercion. The great illusion of cynical thought—obsessed with the struggle for power—consists in denying another essential aspect of reality: the pursuit of legitimate power, of recognised authority, of the best possible regime. Human beings have never believed that politics is defined exclusively by the struggle for power. He who fails to see the "struggle for power" dimension is naïve; he who sees nothing *but* the "struggle for power" is a false realist. The reality we study is a human reality, and within this reality the question of the legitimacy of authority is an integral part (Aron, 1969: 24).

Aron's objection to the philosophy of "false realism" stemmed from the same conviction that led him to criticise the inversion of Clausewitz's Formula. To transform politics into the continuation of war "by other means" meant, in his eyes, to obliterate the distinction between peace and war, between the intrastate and interstate spheres, between ends and means. While the objective of military action was generally to defeat the enemy, the purpose of political action—even violent revolutionary action and the revolutionary people's war—was the conquest of legitimate power within a given political unit: that is, the conquest of obedience on the part of subjects. And—this was the pivotal point—such obedience could not be imposed solely through coercion, nor could it be fully substituted by coercion.

Without grounding his reasoning in a "naturalistic" anthropology, Aron thus recognised that cultural, social, and economic transformations altered the orientations and criteria of individual action over time. He more or less explicitly accepted the other core elements of realism: the idea that politics is conflictual; that political order necessarily requires physical coercion; and that relations of command and subordination inevitably exist. What he rejected were those reductionist explanations that equated politics with conflict. Far less firm, by contrast, was his confidence in the possibility that political knowledge could yield genuine "predictions" about the future. This was, indeed, one of the chief points of his critique of those realists whom he considered—probably unfairly—"orthodox."

From this standpoint, a constant element in Aron's thought—from his earliest writings to the work of his mature years—was his fidelity to the lessons of Dilthey and, above all, of Weber, which had already provided the pivot of his 1938 essay on the philosophy of history (Aron, 1986). His rejection of any monocausal explanation of social and political processes, as well as his critique of "false realism," were tied to the conviction that sociology ought to be a science of comprehension (*Verstehen*), not a science of explanation through causal relations. It was thus a discipline committed to reconstructing the specific cultural frameworks underlying individual actions—a discipline that necessarily had to be historical, capable of situating processes within the concrete contexts in which they unfolded.

Historical understanding, in other words, is the means through which one may reconstruct the meaning of a past event by identifying the meaning actors attributed to their actions. As he wrote in summarising the Weberian lesson, human life "consists of a series of choices through which human beings construct a system of values," and therefore the science of culture must be "the reconstruction and comprehension of the human choices through which a system of values has been constructed" (Aron, 1989: 447). On the basis of his critique of "false realism" and of every form of reductionism, Aron's realism has been described as an "heterodox realism," a "moderate Machiavellianism," and even a "historical-critical realism" (Campi, 1999; 2015). As Alessandro Campi notes, from the perspective of the author of *Peace and War*, "realism, once we recognise the historical character of man and thus of politics, stands in opposition to

naturalism, to positivism, and to any conservative or deterministic conception of human experience and history" (Campi, 2015: 71).

It was also in virtue of this framework that Aron regarded Clausewitz's Formula as an indispensable point of reference. The distinction between warlike action and revolutionary action, as he had argued in the 1973 course, had to be grounded in the pursuit of "legitimacy" rather than in mere effectiveness. Legitimacy, for Aron, was not a secondary attribute of power, nor an inevitable consequence of governmental effectiveness, but a structural element of the political community—the element that oriented the meaning of individual actions. Subjects obeyed commands not simply out of fear of punishment but because they deemed those commands "just," or at least considered the authorities issuing them "legitimate." The conclusions Aron reached remain, in many respects, profoundly valuable today, for—since his proposal "has nothing to do with cynicism, with the relativism of values, or with the nihilistic complacency of those who see the world as always identical to itself" (Campi, 2015: 71)—it may help to avoid one of the most deleterious consequences often associated with realism. Nevertheless, at this precise point in his reflection, a significant gap remains. Despite assigning great importance to legitimacy, he never examined in depth the role played by ideology in producing it, and when he did address the topic, he tended to do so in highly schematic terms.

4. Genealogy and Power

In 1976, precisely the year Aron's *Penser la guerre* appeared, Foucault published *La volonté de savoir*, the first volume of what was intended to be a larger *History of Sexuality*—though the subsequent volumes would in fact appear many years later and follow a markedly different trajectory from the one initially announced. Although only in part, that book was the result of the research path Foucault had undertaken since his arrival at the Collège de France in 1970, when he began to study power from a new perspective. Even in the pages of that volume, a reference to Clausewitz's phrase resurfaced: in introducing his method for studying power, Foucault asked, "Should we then invert the formula and say that politics is

the continuation of war by other means?" His answer stressed that, however one maintained a distinction, it remained necessary to consider them as "two distinct strategies (yet always ready to reverse into one another) for integrating these unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable, and tense relations of force" (Foucault, 1976: 123). This question, posed in *La volonté de savoir*, had in fact guided Foucault's trajectory in the preceding years. His arrival at the Collège de France in 1970 coincided with the beginning of a new phase of research and the adoption of a new perspective that placed war at its centre. The transition to the "genealogical" phase is clearly connected to the influence of Nietzsche, whose thought—already important in earlier years—played a decisive role in shaping Foucault's inquiry. The recent volume *Nietzsche: Courses, conférences et travaux* offers extensive evidence of this presence, collecting materials of various kinds from different periods. As the editor Bernard E. Harcourt explains, Foucault first encountered Nietzsche around 1951, at a time when the German philosopher was still banned in French universities because of the uses to which the Nazis had put him. He probably reached Nietzsche through Heidegger, whom Foucault had read deeply in the early 1950s. Around 1953 he immersed himself seriously in Nietzschean texts, taking notes—now partially reproduced in the volume—and afterwards all the books Foucault published in the 1960s bore some explicit or implicit connection to the German philosopher's writings. Whereas, in this first phase, his interest had focused primarily on *The Birth of Tragedy*, later—with the eruption of the student revolt and the transition into the 1970s—his attention shifted to Nietzsche's "genealogical" and historical works, especially *On the Genealogy of Morality* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. In this phase, Foucault moved, as Harcourt puts it, "from philology to history, to knowledge, and to power" (Harcourt, 2025: 370), eventually elaborating his genealogical method.

After several years in Tunis, Foucault returned to Paris in the autumn of 1968, where he was invited to help establish the new experimental university centre at Vincennes. There, in 1969–1970, he taught a course devoted specifically to Nietzsche (Foucault, 2025: 17–108). He revisited the same themes in a course at the University of Buffalo in 1970 (Foucault, 2025: 108–133) and, later, in the spring of 1971, at McGill University in Montréal. These materials by

no means reveal an "unknown" Foucault, since the influence exerted by the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra* on the French thinker has long been acknowledged. They do, however, allow us to gauge how decisive that influence was for the research programme of the 1970s. In this respect, they partially modify the silhouette of Foucault that shaped his early reception in Italy. As emerges, for instance, from the essays collected in Pier Aldo Rovatti's *Michel Foucault. Il paradosso della soggettivazione* (2023), the juxtaposition of disruptive texts such as *Histoire de la folie* and *Surveiller et punir*, together with the influential anthology *La microfisica del potere* (Foucault, 1977a), had produced the portrait of a thinker first uneasily allied with Marxism and subsequently a forerunner of postmodernism and "weak thought." While not inaccurate, that portrait has since been enriched by further elements: the acknowledged debt to Nietzsche—at least with respect to the elaboration of the genealogical method—has brought to light a dimension long neglected, on which interpreters have been working for some time, as evidenced by the monographic sections "'L'impulsion Nietzsche,'" edited by Michèle Cohen-Halimi and Orazio Irrera in *Materiali Foucaultiani* (Cohen-Halimi and Irrera 2022), and "Foucault and Nietzsche," edited by Irrera and Daniele Lorenzini in *Foucault Studies* (Irrera and Lorenzini 2025), as well as in other collective volumes published on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the philosopher's death (Antoniol and Marino, 2024; Barbetta, Mascaretti and Petrachi, 2024).

This renewed use of Nietzsche was also bound up with the explicit assumption of a militant profile by Foucault, who at the beginning of 1971 engaged (through the founding of the GIP) in the defence of prisoners' conditions. As the dimension of struggle moved to the foreground, the Nietzschean reading—organised through the genealogical method—found its centre of gravity in the relation between power and knowledge: "Truth is not simply the product of a research effort, of hypothesis-testing, data work, reflection and judgment. No, truth is the outcome of a battle, an imposition, a struggle, a series of conflicts" (Harcourt, 2025: 381). The courses taught between 1969 and 1971 converge in the programmatic essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977a), in which genealogy is conceived as an analysis of "forces" and their relations. Following Nietzsche, Foucault programmatically rejects the idea that knowledge of social

processes can be "objective"—not because of the distorting influence of ideology, but because the nexus between power and knowledge cannot be severed. "Truth" can only be partial, consequently, his gaze, rather than seeking an "objective" vantage point (external to conflict), must be situated within the battlefield that traverses society. As Foucault conceives it, genealogy opposes the historians' discourse that, turning to the past, seeks an "origin." "Genealogy," does not pretend "to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things", but rather "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 that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents" (Foucault, 1977b: 154). Genealogy must reconstruct the "emergences" around which subjections are formed, the conflicts that lead to dominations, without searching for a putative "origin" and without aspiring to identify a terminal point that would halt contention, for war does not cease.

Decisive for deciphering the features of Foucault's genealogical method is Daniele Lorenzini's *The Force of Truth: Critique, Genealogy, and Truth-Telling in Michel Foucault* (Lorenzini, 2023), which offers a systematic and innovative reconstruction of Foucaultian genealogy, emphasising its ethic-political character and critical function. Lorenzini argues that genealogy should not be read as a mere historical methodology or as a device for unmasking, but rather as a practice of interrogating the ways in which regimes of veridiction shape subjects, bodies, and forms of life. Genealogy, he contends, rejects any linear conception of history and any search for origins, insisting instead on discontinuity, contingency, and the conflictual nature of truth-production. It thus becomes a "history of the present," capable of revealing the non-necessity of the institutions and practices that govern us.

Within the profusion of research and interpretation devoted to Foucault over the past two decades, the courses he delivered between 1971 and 1976 have been read from multiple angles—especially within inquiries into "biopolitics." Yet, rather strikingly, the centrality he assigns to war (and thus to the inversion of Clausewitz's

Formula) has often been relegated to the background. This gap is now filled by two books by Valentina Antoniol (2023; 2024), with which the author completes a rich project of reinterpretation whose results had been partially anticipated in earlier work. As their titles make clear, Antoniol does not merely reread the courses of the early 1970s in order to foreground the central role that war (in a very broad sense, and thus not as armed clash between state armies) plays in Foucault's analysis of power. She also undertakes a cross-reading of the Collège courses with several writings by Carl Schmitt, arguing that the German jurist's hypotheses—and, in particular, those advanced in *Der Begriff des Politischen*—constituted a theoretical challenge with which Foucault engaged.

Antoniol thus follows a twofold path—so much so that the only objection one might raise is that she has fused together, both in *Foucault et la guerre* and in *Foucault critico di Schmitt* (which extends and enriches the first book), what might have been two distinct monographs. On the one hand, she reconstructs the way in which war becomes central to Foucault's perspective from the early 1970s onward, such that what she terms the "polemocritical schema" emerges as the principal analytical grid for reconstructing power relations; on the other, through genuinely original research, she aims to show that Foucault's reflection unfolds while silently confronting Schmitt. *Foucault critico di Schmitt* opens with a methodological reflection that situates the inquiry squarely on the Foucaultian terrain of an "ontology of the present." From the outset, Antoniol makes clear that to interrogate war is to confront a dimension that is at once historical and theoretical and, above all, constitutes the "immediate mediation of our actuality" (Antoniol, 2024: 12). Following Foucault, she observes that war is not external to modern politics but its internal and permanently active condition. Hence it returns as a repressed element: "we believed we had succeeded [...] in rendering it gentle and confining it to distant lands" (Antoniol, 2024: 12), yet its re-emergence exposes the fragility of modernity's political categories. The aim of the book is to show that, by "reversing the celebrated Clausewitzian formula—arguing, that is, that it is not war that is the continuation of politics by other means, but, conversely, politics that must be understood as the continuation of war—Foucault elaborates a polemocritical schema" (Antoniol, 2024: 13). By this

expression—borrowed from Michel Senellart, who used it without clear definition—Antoniol intends to name Foucault's specific use of war: "a model centred on war as a critical instrument and as a matrix for analysing the functioning of discourses, history, and power relations; a model that, at the same time, deploys critique as an instrument of war," and thereby enables "processes of subjectivation through a decision by subjects regarding the stance to be taken—a decision that inevitably excludes neutrality" (Antoniol, 2024: 13).

War—understood in a very broad sense—thus becomes for Foucault a tool for devising a schema capable of grasping power relations. Antoniol stresses that Foucault's model does not merely use war as a metaphor: it seeks to show that "politics must be understood as the continuation of war," thereby inverting Clausewitz's formula. Politics is what maintains and reworks a primary, uninterrupted conflict that traverses the social body. This interpretive move places Foucault's analysis at the crossroads of genealogical critique, historical inquiry, and political theory. Antoniol further clarifies that the entire project rests on the claim that the paradigm of war is not a marginal episode in Foucault's oeuvre but "a central node of his work" (Antoniol, 2024: 14). It is therefore necessary to "reopen the case," against entrenched interpretations that tended to isolate the 1975–76 course *"Il faut défendre la société"* (*Society Must Be Defended*) as an anomalous moment quickly superseded by the emergence of biopolitics.

A decisive part of Antoniol's reconstruction consists in showing the continuity of the discourse on war in Foucault's oeuvre. "For a long time it was believed that the use of the polemocritical schema was a brief parenthesis" (Antoniol, 2024: 28), she observes; yet the 1971–72 course, *Theories and Penal Institutions* (Foucault, 2019), and the 1972–73 course, *The Punitive Society* (Foucault, 2015) demonstrate that well before 1976 Foucault analysed power as a latent "civil war," an internal conflict constantly denied and normalised. The publication of these courses—long ignored by the secondary literature—now allows us to appreciate fully the centrality that the polemocritical schema assumed in Foucault's work. Moreover, by delving into the vast archival holdings now available—Foucault's own library, courses, unpublished manuscripts, published texts—Antoniol reconstructs the "implicit" framework within which the

1975–76 course was situated. Her book is not, however, an archival exercise aimed merely at philological clarification; it is an inquiry designed to delineate Foucault's interpretive schema, its theoretical-philosophical matrix, his specific use of the image of war, and the way in which, in the early 1970s, war serves above all as a grid of intelligibility for power relations. An innovative part of her work lies precisely in the use of unpublished materials from the Fonds Michel Foucault at the Bnf. These documents—nearly 37,000 sheets—make it possible to reconstruct more precisely the logic of the polemocritical schema and to trace the "silent confrontation" with Schmitt. Yet for Antoniol the use of manuscripts is not an end in itself: "philology must be considered as a means and not as an end" (Antoniol, 2024: 30). The true aim is to grasp what Foucault enables us "to think and to say" today. The manuscripts show that Foucault's analyses of war are more complex and extensive than the published works alone suggested. They confirm that the war paradigm functions as the conceptual laboratory in which Foucault elaborates his critique of the juridical, an agonistic conception of power, the genealogy of state racism, and the emergence of biopolitics.

A central claim highlighted in the introduction is that political modernity rests upon a long process of the repression of civil war. Antoniol reconstructs Foucault's reading of the Hobbesian tradition as an attempt to occlude the original conflict that traverses society. Modern sovereignty does not eliminate civil war: it incorporates, neutralises, and transforms it into a mechanism of government. What appears as juridical order is, in reality, the result of an original decision that consolidates the domination of one part over another (Antoniol, 2024: 13). Here the shadow of Carl Schmitt begins to become visible, even if Foucault does not name him explicitly. Antoniol first stresses that Foucault and Schmitt share the idea that politics originates in conflict; but she also notes that they diverge radically on the function of sovereignty and on the definition of the enemy. The Schmittian model—founded on the friend/enemy distinction and on the necessity of a deciding authority—appears to Foucault as an attempt to ground unity through exclusion. Foucault's genealogy, by contrast, shows how power is produced within a multiplicity of conflicts, without any unifying foundation. Within this framework, the specific mode by which Foucault

articulates critique takes shape: critique is conceived as a battle that itself avails itself of the discourse of battles. Hence the definition of the polemocritical schema: a model that employs war as an instrument of critique and critique as an instrument of war.

First, critique cannot be considered external to power, occupying a position that is prior or privileged with respect to it. It is, rather, the very essence of the war model which—at least for a certain period—Foucault interprets as the characteristic schema governing the functioning of power relations. Second, critique engages not only a process of desubjugation of knowledges but also of subjects. The genealogist, Foucault notes, is the one who asks, "which speaking, discoursing subject—what subject of experience and of knowledge—is reduced to minority at the moment when certain putatively scientific discourses are developed and imposed" (Antoniol, 2024: 99). The author also demonstrates the line of continuity between this conception of critique and the one developed in the following years (e.g. Foucault, 2024)

The second line of inquiry pursued by Antoniol aims to demonstrate that Foucault, throughout much of the 1970s, maintained a kind of "silent dialogue" with the theorist of the friend–enemy distinction—so much so that one may legitimately claim that Schmitt exerted a "direct influence" upon him. Indeed, it would ultimately be precisely this confrontation with Schmitt that persuaded the author of *Discipline and Punish* to abandon the model of war. Yet demonstrating such an influence is exceedingly difficult.

Antoniol's investigation begins, in fact, from exceedingly tenuous traces. In none of Foucault's published works does Schmitt's name appear, nor does it seem that the jurist's name was ever uttered in the lecture halls where Foucault taught. The reasons are not difficult to discern. Foucault rarely cited his theoretical sources explicitly, and thus his silence regarding Schmitt is not, in itself, surprising. But the sinister reputation that the German jurist carried in France made any engagement with his work especially delicate, so much so that it is entirely understandable that his name never surfaced in Foucault's published writings, nor in his lectures or public presentations.

Der Begriff des Politischen was republished—together with *Theorie des Partisanen*—in a series edited by Aron in 1972 (Schmitt, 1972b), at the very moment in which the Italian anthology *Le*

categorie del politico, edited by Gianfranco Miglio and Pierangelo Schiera, was reintroducing Schmitt's thought into Italian debate (Schmitt, 1972a). The French volume was introduced by Julien Freund who, years earlier, had incorporated Schmitt's hypothesis into his doctoral dissertation on the "essence" of the political. After encountering Schmitt's work, Freund had altered his plan of research and presented it to his supervisor, Jean Hyppolite, who not only disagreed with its orientation but also denied any scientific dignity to a thinker compromised by Nazism. Hyppolite therefore refused to continue supervising Freund's work, prompting him to seek support from Aron, who helped him complete the dissertation later published as *L'essence du politique* in 1965 (Freund, 1996). As Antoniol notes, the reservations expressed by Hyppolite were common among French intellectuals.

This climate may partly explain Foucault's silence. But given such circumstances, demonstrating any actual influence of Schmitt on Foucault inevitably becomes a complex undertaking. Nonetheless, Antoniol succeeds—operating on several analytical levels. First, she identifies in certain passages from Foucault's 1970s lectures at the Collège de France clear resonances with Schmittian formulations, especially concerning the friend–enemy antagonism. The decisive convergence appears in the 1976 course, where unmistakably Schmittian tones emerge—for instance, when Foucault evokes the hypothesis of a "termination of the political," which would suspend "the exercise of power as permanent war," thereby superseding the friend–enemy division. In elaborating his polemocritical schema for analysing power relations, Foucault seems to have encountered Schmitt's thought—or at least the French translation of *The Concept of the Political*, published in those years. It is impossible to establish with certainty that Foucault read or owned the volume, though it cannot be excluded that—given the topic and Aron's presence at the Collège—he paid it some attention (as some of Foucault's collaborators vaguely recalled in interviews with Antoniol). The textual similarities between certain Foucauldian formulations and passages of *Der Begriff des Politischen* would not, by themselves, suffice to demonstrate direct influence; nor do collaborators' memories amount to more than suggestive conjectures. But Antoniol pushes her inquiry further, examining unpublished manuscripts in search

of more substantive traces. It is by "exhuming" several handwritten sheets from an enormous archive of unpublished notes that Antoniol uncovers decisive evidence. These documents demonstrate—clearly and indisputably—that the philosopher of "the micro-physics of power" was well acquainted with Schmitt's essay on the political and with the friend–enemy hypothesis (Antoniol, 2024: 211–216). They allow us to identify a "direct influence" (Antoniol, 2024: 203) of Schmitt and to perceive how the binary opposition between two totalized camps—friends and enemies—shaped Foucault's thinking up to 1976. As Antoniol observes, "it is precisely through Schmitt that one can grasp the structure of the polemocritical schema" employed by Foucault. This does not, however, imply any real agreement between the two thinkers. Their conceptions of the relationship between order and conflict remain fundamentally opposed. Moreover, Foucault is sharply critical of Schmitt's insistence that order requires the elimination (or severe restriction) of pluralism within the political community. Indeed, in the 1976 course, Foucault identifies in the "State racism" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "a kind of biological extrapolation of the theme of the political enemy." In this logic—brought to its extremes by Nazism—the "internal enemy" must be expelled from the body of the "race," which must be defended against its "impure" elements. Foucault's trajectory, "beginning from Schmitt," therefore develops in many respects "against Schmitt." Aware of the dangers implicit in conceiving politics through a sharp, totalizing dualism, Foucault begins after 1976 to look elsewhere. As Antoniol writes in an important passage, two distinct conceptions of war intersect in Foucault's thought: "if the first conception of war corresponds to a dual logic, the second rests upon a binary logic that Foucault cannot but reject" (Antoniol, 2024: 149); "the polemocritical schema culminates in what may be understood as a critique of that very Schmittian model, which—expressed in Foucauldian terms—amounts to a conception of war as a paradoxical device of social defence, control, and obedience", and so, abandoning the war model means distancing oneself decisively from Schmitt, that is, from the political consequences that might follow from adopting a binary rather than a dual logic of antagonism (Antoniol, 2024: 150). The confrontation with Schmitt's "shadow" thus ends with the abandonment of the polemocritical

schema. As he closed the most "militant" phase of his intellectual activity, Foucault turned toward an agonistic model—one that resists the temptation to view society solely through the prism of a friend/enemy cleavage.

5. A "Hidden Dialogue" Between Heterodox Realists?

Examining recent works dedicated to Aron and Foucault, alongside newly published or republished materials (including unpublished manuscripts), the preceding pages have shown how one may discern the traces of a kind of "hidden dialogue" between the two thinkers during the years in which they both taught at the Collège de France. Aron and Foucault arrived there almost simultaneously, in 1970, and for roughly eight years—until the spring of 1978, when the author of *Peace and War Among Nations* retired—they delivered their lectures in parallel. Without any apparent connection between their respective activities, both turned in their courses to Clausewitz's reflections on war (even though, in truth, Foucault only grazed the Prussian strategist's thought occasionally and marginally). Aron's objective, however, was in many respects antithetical to Foucault's: he sought to criticize any inversion of the Formula and, in particular, to challenge all theoretical positions which—in the heated atmosphere of the period—saw in social conflicts the "continuation" of war, and which tended, for instance, to treat "symbolic violence" as a phenomenon not too distant from physical violence. For Foucault, by contrast, interest in Clausewitz focused largely on the Formula itself and especially on the idea that it should be reversed—that politics might be understood as the continuation of war by other means.

Although their reflections remained profoundly distant, and despite the fact that Clausewitz served for Foucault largely as an intellectual pretext, the perspectives each thinker elaborated bore a subtle affinity with the tradition of political realism. In both cases, as the analysis has shown, theirs were heterodox realisms: critical of the notion that the roots of political phenomena lie in an immutable "human nature" (that is, in the primordial "natural" impulses *Homo sapiens* is thought to have inherited from an ancestral past); and critical of all positivist variants of realism, which assume that

the "laws" of politics may be discovered analogously to those of the natural sciences, and that such knowledge permits prediction of political futures. If their critique of evolutionary and positivist realisms unites Aron and Foucault, the two thinkers diverge sharply on another point: the relationship between force and morality.

As earlier shown, Aron criticized the "false realism" of those who regarded power, its pursuit, and its exercise as the core of politics, while thereby underestimating the fact that reality is also constituted by ideals and moral constraints. This orientation grounds Aron's rejection of any inversion of Clausewitz's Formula. For the author of *Peace and War Among Nations*, politics cannot be understood as a continuation of war, for a substantial difference remains between domestic politics, which concerns what occurs "within" political communities, and international politics, which pertains to relations "between" them: those who exercise power "within" a community, or seek to acquire it, must continually secure the obedience of subjects and thus must be perceived as "legitimate"; those who aim to defeat an enemy in war seek only to break the enemy's will, even to annihilate him, but do not aim to be perceived by the enemy as a "legitimate" sovereign to whom obedience is ethically owed.

Foucault's operation moves in a different direction and, in many respects, proposes an inversion of the image of the relationship between sovereign and subject presupposed by Aron. The objective of the early-1970s lectures is to employ the war schema as a "grid of intelligibility" of the power relations that traverse and constitute society. The polemical target is precisely the model of sovereignty: a model that presupposes the legitimacy of the law and the unity of power, and that, above all, conceives the sovereign demanding obedience and the subject obeying because he recognizes sovereign authority as legitimate as subjects pre-existing the relation of subjection. For Foucault, by contrast, subjects do not exist outside power relations; they are "fabricated" by relations of subjection. Since the subject can never be disentangled from the power relations that incessantly constitute and reconstitute it as a "subject," power cannot be renounced—there is no "outside" of power relations. In this sense, Foucault's reasoning aligns closely with the coordinates of political realism, which conceives the exercise of power as an ineliminable given, and converges with this tradition insofar as it conceives social

reality as irreducibly and inevitably antagonistic. Because power is immanent, and because conflicts of power constitute subjects, "war" may be understood as an interminable process coursing through society even under the name of "peace." The subjects of this struggle—the protagonists of this "partisan war"—cannot, for Foucault, be conceived in the terms of the Cartesian subject of modern philosophy: they are subjects constituted in perpetual struggle, forging truth-discourses within that struggle. "Truths" are therefore always partial, always constructed within conflict, as weapons of battle. Just as it is impossible to exit power relations, so too is it impossible to discover a "neutral" ground from which to apprehend an "objective" truth. The genealogist's task is precisely to expose this partiality, to illuminate the logic of its construction.

Within the broader reconstruction of contemporary reflections on power, Pier Paolo Portinaro has argued that, beginning in the early 1970s, one may discern in Michel Foucault's intellectual trajectory a "Schmittian turn" in a "hyper-realist" sense (Portinaro, 2021: 49). More specifically, this turn would coincide with Foucault's inversion of Clausewitz's celebrated "Formula"—according to which war is the continuation of politics by other means—a reversal articulated in his lectures and in several writings from the 1970s. Portinaro's observation is far from devoid of polemical overtones, for in his view Foucault's contribution, and especially the interpretations it has inspired over the last three decades, would have played a significant role in fostering deleterious distortions within contemporary debates on power. Nonetheless, despite this critical component, Portinaro's claim concerning Foucault's "hyper-realist turn" identifies an important point.

To inquire whether Foucault can, in some measure, be situated within the tradition of political realism—or whether elements of his research bring him closer to that tradition—requires confronting, first and foremost, the cumbersome anthropology of realism, an anthropology that depicts human beings in markedly "pessimistic" terms. The answer to this initial question is less straightforward than one might assume. In Foucault's work one finds no anthropological grounding comparable to that which characterizes the major exponents of realism, beginning with Hobbes's description of the state of nature; yet his reflection on the relationship with "nature"

is more nuanced. Throughout his work, the French thinker generally attributes power dynamics to the cultural domain, although he does not entirely disregard the possible influence of "natural" variables. Although Foucault does not understand "human nature" as the wholly cultural product of construction, the realism's anthropological foundations cannot but be profoundly problematized in light of his inquiries. Yet the centrality of war in the genealogical phase of his thought converges with the realist claim that the human world is irredeemably marked by conflict—a conflict not reducible to a series of dialectical antagonisms.

Thus, although one cannot locate in Foucault's work an anthropological foundation, the central role assumed by war in his genealogical period converges with the realist view that human existence is fundamentally conflictual. Without surreptitiously reintroducing an invariant human nature, Foucault implicitly presupposes—through his appeal to Nietzsche—the insurmountability of conflict, which may assume wholly heterogeneous forms and continually generate new terrains of struggle. It is precisely this conviction that marks Foucault's principal divergence from the Marxists—or at least from those who equate the future overcoming of capitalism with the end of conflict and of domination of humans over humans.

It is precisely by virtue of the centrality assigned to the "polemocritical" schema and to the inflection given to his courses in the first half of the 1970s that Foucault's contribution can be understood as a specific variant of realism. Not, of course, on the side of prediction—which is completely foreign to Foucault's gaze—but rather on that of the relation between the subject and the object of research. By tying truth and power together, Foucault tackles a problem that Hans J. Morgenthau—explicitly a realist, and himself an attentive reader of Nietzsche—had already raised in his criticism of behavioural social scientists and their naïve view of an "objective" knowledge free from constraints. Going far beyond the limits to which Morgenthau was prepared to go, Foucault pushes to the extreme a key realist conviction: the conviction—suggested by Schmitt's famous claim about the polemical character of political concepts—that power is capable of shaping every aspect of collective life, and thus even the words, techniques and gaze of those who analyse it, in a kind of inescapable short circuit. As the introduction to a small "militant" anthology

of Foucault's writings observes, "his analyses confront us with what remains unthought in ourselves and in our practices", "they make evident that everything we take for granted, everything we regard as normal, has in fact undergone a historical evolution and is the result of contingent situations and social conflicts that have left their mark on our institutions and discourses" (Borca, 2025: 10). This means, therefore, that the process which has given rise to laws, philosophical theories, sciences, and disciplines "has been a violent battlefield, from which we have distilled a form of knowledge purged of this history of domination and exclusion" (Borca, 2025: 10). Precisely for this reason, when he points to the path of genealogy, Foucault is able to abandon the pretensions of an objective standpoint and to recognise—albeit not without serious consequences for those who aspire to decipher the "regularities" of politics—that knowledge of the "effective truth of the thing" is itself produced within the very battle that one seeks to observe, understand and assess "objectively".

Drawing on Nietzsche's lesson, which he interprets in an original key, he instead traces values, culture, and ideology to the "partial truths" forged as weapons within the perpetual war of power. His peculiar realism—which, with some interpretive license, one might call "genealogical realism"—practices critique while avoiding the danger present in some strands of critical theory, which exercise critique "from outside" power relations and thus presume that their analytical standpoint is "objective" (and hence exempt from the power relations through which subjects are constituted). Genealogical realism, by contrast, does not seek an "objective" vantage point from which to observe conflicts "from without"; it situates itself within the battlefield that traverses society. In prescribing genealogy, Foucault abandons the pretensions of objective observation and acknowledges that even knowledge of the "effective truth of the matter" is ultimately produced within the very struggle one seeks to observe, comprehend, and evaluate "objectively."

By following this path, one may thus discern in Foucault—as in Aron—valuable keys for rethinking the realist tradition: a rethinking that avoids not only the shortcuts of cynicism, but also the misconceptions of positivist approaches; and a rethinking that resists the temptation to conceive "critique" merely as an evaluation of reality articulated from the value-laden standpoint of the observing subject.

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