

ARTICLE

## Response to Hamann and McWhorter

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It is great good fortune to have generous readers. Both Professor Hamann and Professor McWhorter have interpreted my remarks in the most positive light, and by doing so have forced me to agree with their interpretations. Moreover, they have done me the service of extending my views in important directions, thus teaching me into the bargain. In response to their comments, I would like, after a brief confession, to engage a common theme that underlies the concerns of both.

The confession is this. Professor Hamann wonders why I did not discuss HIV/AIDS in my treatment of recent changes in sexuality, since it is clearly a significant development. I, too, wonder this. It is an oversight, and I am grateful for his calling attention to it. As he notes, the spread of HIV/AIDS does not undermine a Foucaultian genealogical approach to the current state of our sexuality. One might well argue that it requires one. It would undoubtedly, however, figure as a central element in such a genealogy.

The common underlying theme concerns what we might call the question of global challenges to discipline. Professor Hamann notes, correctly, that my defense of Foucault against the charges leveled against him by Deleuze and Baudrillard does not intend itself to be a critique of their contributions to understanding globalization. He argues that we must recognize the existence of globalization, and approach it in a more nuanced way, making discussions of it “more genealogical, more Foucaultian.” Professor McWhorter also indicates a global concern, but approaches it from a different direction. She notes that we are approaching the end of the age of oil, and that this will have important ramifications for biopower and resistance to it. After all, practices of biopower rely on certain technologies, and those technologies often rely on oil-based products. As access to oil decreases, she suspects, “biopower as a vast network of interlocking and overlapping practices would soon break down.” This, too, is a global issue, one that may require what she calls “a genealogy of petro-bio-power.”

What both Professor Hamann and Professor McWhorter suggest is that, since Foucault’s death, there have been important global changes in our

world, changes that, while they require a genealogical approach in order fully to grasp, nevertheless have altered fundamentally the situation we find ourselves in, or at least will soon do so. Do we not, as Professor Hamann suggests, live in a world where Deleuze's concept of a control society, if suitably nuanced, would, at least in some sense and to some degree, replace that of (or the primacy of) discipline? And will not the end of the age of oil undermine the normalizing project that lies at the heart of discipline?

One thing is certain. The environmental changes that the world is undergoing will have deep and lasting, although as yet unforeseen effects. Professor McWhorter speaks of decreasing access to oil. Although she does not mention it, she no doubt also recognizes the importance of global warming. Global warming does not have the same effects on the technology of biopower as access to petroleum products. However, by causing massive dislocation and shifting environmental conditions, it will complement the end of the age of oil by causing an increasing demand for environmental resources under less stable conditions.

What will be the result of such changes? Professor McWhorter argues that the path of taming populations by way of an increase in biopolitical techniques will be blocked. Will Deleuze's control society more fully replace it? Alternatively, will the control society be unable to operate effectively when resources are scarce and violence increases? Will we, instead, inhabit a more Hobbesian society in which the elites control access to scarce resources while the rest of us struggle for survival? Will the elites be able to sustain such control, technologically and politically? Are gated communities, with their surveillance and exclusionary practices, the way of the future? Or do Katrina and its aftermath provide a more accurate picture? And, finally, what will all this look like on the ground? What practices will it change, what practices will it create, and what will be their relation?

These are questions whose answers are as elusive as they are urgent. As Professors Hamann and McWhorter argue, in approaching them reflectively the important thing is to keep to a Foucaultian sobriety. That sobriety requires a close watch on what has made us who we are now and what might make us different in the future. As Foucault insists, the rise of discipline and of biopower is not something anyone could have predicted. However, if one were looking closely, one might have noticed technologies of regimentation, moralization, and intervention spreading across various practices in Europe. Where should we look now? At the rise of the digital culture that is at the heart of Deleuze's control society? Certainly. At the environmental changes that are now upon us? Undoubtedly. What will we see when we look? We don't know; we need to research them in their historical trajectory. And that is the Foucaultian point, stressed by both Professor Hamann and Professor McWhorter. But, it is clear, we must look. Not simply in order to understand, but in order to resist. In order that we

might recognize the workings of power upon us, and at the same time grasp the spaces of freedom those workings allow us. In order to cut our way through the nets of what Foucault sometimes calls the “intolerable.”

We do not know in what ways and to what extent the global changes Professor Hamann and Professor McWhorter call our attention to already have altered and will further alter the specific situation Foucault’s writings describe. We can be confident that, sooner or later, that situation will be altered, and that the more we understand those alterations, the more we can resist the egregious constraints they subject us to. What my have done is to gesture toward important trends in our world, trends that we ignore only at our peril. But, in keeping with Foucaultian modesty, they neither predict nor make grand generalizations. They call instead for committed and yet patient analysis of how we arrived here and where we might be headed, and they suggest points where analysis can or must pass through. For that, those of us who have not yet sacrificed the question of who we might be and how we might live in the face of the challenges our world erects must be grateful.