'My Struggle': The Congealing of History

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Whatever our theoretical differences might be within the Academy, and they seem quite considerable, we all seem to be sure that racism - as discourse and political practice - takes place, and was taking place, outside, outside our discourse. So it appears that we have constructed an outside for our theoretical practice. An outside that allows us to occupy, even colonise, the inside which is also the true-side and, one might be tempted to say, the rightside, the side of the moral high ground of racist discourse. This paper attempts to collapse these distinctions through the vehicle of the philosophy of history.

My contribution here places before you another discourse, among the discourses about discourses, that looks at the question of identity, from within a conception of the philosophy of history. Or to put it rather less coyly and less sensitively, this paper is both about, and in some sense represents, one kind of struggle for identity, for a name and for a place within discourse.

Of course to struggle with one's writing is a common theme to all the humanities and in particular to philosophy. One could offer many illustrious examples of such struggles, from Augustine's *Confessions* to Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum*, and to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. These texts besides all being certain kinds of struggles have an intimate relation with the dual modes of biography and autobiography (cf. Barker, 1985), but for now I want to stress that there is a certain kind of literary/ philosophical history to be taken into account here, a history where the struggle with a text has become an essential part of the history of philosophy. This brings me to the point where I want to direct attention to one of those great philosophical struggles that has somehow escaped classification as philosophical; this text goes by the name of 'My Struggle', although its title is almost never translated into English even when the rest of the text is, and so we nearly all know it still in its German title as *Mein Kampf* (Hitler, 1983). The untranslatability of this title is perhaps a mark of the demonic nature of the text itself, a sign that this is the product of a culture alien to the English speaking world, a culture that traces its origins back to the Visigoths or Huns who, according to popular English history,

were the descendants of non Greek speaking barbarians who had been causing trouble in Europe for thousands of years and who were ultimately responsible for the decline of the high culture of the Roman empire. This might all be seen as the nonsense for which it obviously is, were it not for the fact that the question of the untranslatability of *Mein Kampf* is suspended by the intervention of a publisher's note inside the front cover of the 1983 text before the translator, the writer or the authorised introducer have been given any opportunity to speak. I quote:

> This notorious book did not circulate in this country or in the Commonwealth territories for many years-in fact from 1944-1969 when this edition, in hard bound format, was published mainly for public library use, with the valuable introduction by D.C. Watt. It is now thought right that a rather less expensive edition in paper binding should also be available for students and others who need reminding of the vile nonsense which precipitated World War II and which has become for ever a fact of history... The origin of Hitler is almost irrelevant. What is important is that he existed, that he brought tragedy to his people and the world, and that there are still sympathisers in many parts of the world today. *Mein Kampf* is a compendium of their prejudices and ignorance, whether they belong to the German, British or any other nation.

> It is therefore necessary that Hitler, their prototype, 'the master of the inept, the undigested, the half baked and the untrue', should be understood. *Mein Kampf* is an introduction to his mind and methods, and as such should be readily available for study by all and, in our view, in every language.

> In his Introduction Professor Watt sets Hitler against his background, gives the origins and history of *Mein Kampf* and finishes with a critical assessment of the book. This book will alas continue for ever to be essential reading for all students of twentieth-century history. It cannot be ever forgotten that millions had to die to rid the world of the evil creed it so violently imposed. (Hitler, 1983 inside front cover).

D.C. Watt the introducer goes on to refer to Hitler as a demon, and speaks of *Mein Kampf* in terms of the 'peculiar illiteracy of its contribution to political literature', and then talks of its origins. The unconscious reference to the demonic with its double meaning of both evil and genius, and the absence of this text for fifteen years from English publication, perhaps has something to do with its suggestive power for a European culture to become increasingly fascist. At the very least, we can say that if we characterise *Mein Kampf* as mad or even demonic then we can see it as an aberration, a detour from the 'progressive' civilising influence of Western culture. This seems to me to be all rather too easy, because like it or not *Mein Kampf* is part of the cultural heritage of the West and rather than dismiss it out of hand we might do better perhaps to subject it to the

kind of analysis to which other philosophical and literary texts are sub-jected. We might then discover something rather more frightening, that *Mein Kampf* is neither demonic nor mad but a necessary event within the culture of the West. Fascism and its accompanying racism would then equally not be mad or demonic but part of that same history, and this is surely rather more disturbing than a fascism and a racism of madness, darkness and barbarism.

Before pausing to pick up the themes from *Mein Kampf* that I want to discuss, a question needs reiterating. Why is it that *Mein Kampf* is exclud-ed from its rightful textual place in the history of philosophy? For without a doubt, in *Mein Kampf* and other writings by Hitler a number of the themes dealt with and references given come directly from the history of philosophy, as it had been conceived by academics working in Europe after the first world war. So we find mention of Fichte, Schopenhauer, Voltaire, Rousseau, Goethe, Luther, Wagner, Schiller and others. The theme of the relation between philosophy, desire and death, so central in *Mein Kampf* has its own discontinuous philosophical history from Socrates to Abelard to Rousseau, de Sade and so on. The question then is why is this text not considered to be part of the history or philosophy? I do not propose to offer an answer here, but the question is worth raising.

What I want to draw out of *Mein Kampf* is a theme repeated over and over again in the writings of Hitler, namely, the attaining of a personal identity by overcoming namelessness. I do not propose here to develop an argu-ment that psychoanalyses Hitler's relation with his father, although such a paper could no doubt prove interesting, but the theme of personal identi-ty, namelessness and its overcoming does provide the thread that this paper will attempt to follow.

In a speech in Dusseldorf in 1932 Hitler said about his return from the war in 1918:

> I was naturally forced to say to myself that it would be an appalling struggle, for I was not so fortunate to possess an outstanding name; I was only a nameless German soldier, with a small zinc identification number on my breast (Hitler, 1942:95).

In 1939, he reiterated this preoccupation:

> Twenty years ago, nameless and alone, I began. Nineteen years ago I stood for the first time in this place, facing alone a shouting mob, many of whom still opposed me. (Hitler, 1942:474).

Again, in 1940, he returned to this theme:

> Who was I before the Great War? An unknown nameless individual.

> What was I during the war? A quite inconspicuous ordinary soldier...
> Should anyone say to me: 'These are more fantastic dreams, mere vi-
> sions', I can only reply that when I set out on my course in 1919 as an
> unknown nameless soldier I built my hopes of the future upon a most
> vivid imagination. Yet all has come true. What I am planning or aiming
> at today is nothing compared to what I have already accomplished and
> achieved. It will be achieved sooner and more definitely than
> everything already achieved. The road from an unknown and nameless
> person to Führer of the German nation was harder than the way from
> the Führer of the German nation to creator of the coming peace. (Hitler,
> 1942:709,716).

And then perhaps most significantly of all we learn in *Mein Kampf* of the
founding instance of the Nazi party,

> Consider that six or seven men, all nameless poor devils, had joined
> together with the intention of forming a mass movement, hoping to
> succeed - where the powerful great mass of parties had hitherto failed
> - in restoring a German Reich of greater power and glory. (Hitler,
> 1983;353).

I apologise for quoting so much here but it seems to me that there is an im-
portant point to be made, that is, the search for a name, for an identity, the
need to make something of oneself, is a constitutive element of fascism.
This certainly is not so foreign to those of us who work within the
Academy, as to a large extent one's success here is also dependent on mak-
ing a name for ourselves within our chosen fields. I say this not to suggest
that we must therefore all be fascists, but to remind us that the issues raised
in this paper are perhaps not so far away from us as we might like to think.

To this something else must be added, something that emerges from the
last quote, the claim to an identity is also based on a certain conception of
one's cultural history, found in the return to the glorious past. So a per-
sonal history and a cultural history fuse together to produce something
that we might call fascist micro-techniques of desire. These cultural and
personal histories intersect in a certain kind of historical methodology that
is discussed and examined by Foucault in the essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy*
and History? (Foucault, 1980:139-164).

The return to the glorious past, to the achievements of a golden age, is the
kind of history described by Foucault as the search for origins, which cor-
responds to a distinction made by Nietzsche in the Preface to the
Genealogy of Morals between *Herkunft* and *Ursprung* (Nietzsche, 1969).
Foucault interprets *Ursprung* as the search for origins, embodying the
earlier Nietzschean terms of Antiquarian, Monumental and Objective
History; and *Herkunft* he interprets as Critical History which he will recast
and transform as Genealogy (cf. Nietzsche, 1983:57-124; Foucault, 1980;

Barker, 1985). Foucault argues that there are three problems with the search for origins which I paraphrase below;

> 1) It is an attempt to capture the essence of things, their past purest moments, which implies that at the end of it all lies some pure immobile form underlying a world of chance or coincidental effects. It appeals to some primordial truth, some original true identity under a series of masks.
>
> 2) The moment of origin is a metaphysical concept derived from the idea that things are 'most' precious and essential at the moment of their birth. That 'once upon a time', things were perfectly clear, good, and everything was known, then came the fall - time, space and history.
>
> 3) Which is a combination of 1) and 2) is that 'the postulate of the origin' is ultimately the site of truth. The origin becomes the place of loss, where the truth of 'things' corresponds to the truthful discourse - the sight of 'a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost'.

And to this might be added a fourth point derived from Foucault's other writings,

> 4) The construction of history as a unity, marked by an unfolding temporality becomes the founding instance of subjectivity within Western culture. Whether this subject is Rationalist, Dialectical, Positivist and so on, it is parasitic on specific notions of continuity, temporality, truth and transparency etc.

The plea in *Mein Kampf* for the return to a glorious past, to an age of golden dreams, finds a double leverage as this past becomes that moment of pure unadulterated heroic Aryan blood. This then is the intersection of both the glorious state and the pure blood of the race that occupied it; both must be returned to, recaptured and re-experienced. Every detail must be made known, made clear, from the unbroken history of an age old Aryan culture to the infinitesimal micro details of the distribution of the cells of that pure blood that transmits both that history and subjectivity on to the present day.

This process becomes the congealing of history, whereby history can be added to, altered, rewritten as long as the basic assumptions of the return to origins and its attendant continuities and unities are not challenged. This congealing of history and the tracing of the uncontaminated pure blood become in effect the same metaphor. A pure moment of the unfolding of absolute history, unadulterated, uncontaminated, disease free, frozen, against which individual identity and subjectivity are measured.

This absolute history is the history against which the individual finds a

space in the social structure; the defining of the origin becomes the over-coming of namelessness, a history and a place is offered from which to claim an identity. All those who cannot or will not share in this history, this blood, become the absolute other, the bearers of disease and con-tamination, the evil against which good or self interest can be measured.

To recapitulate then, two themes that we can draw out of *Mein Kampf* are the desire to overcome namelessness and the recovery of an origin in which is located one's glorious cultural history. Of course, because they are both elements of fascism it does not mean that this is the only site of their expression. We must now look closer to home because in bi-centennial Australia the conjunction of these two elements is again coming to the fore. This is occurring in a double instance: first, in the recovery of the so-called finally truthful Anglo-European Australian historical past, and secondly, in the re-representation of Aboriginal culture from eons ago to its interaction with Northern European culture. What these seemingly an-tithetical programmes have in common is that they both re-enact the search for origins, the origin of contemporary Australian culture, the origin of white settlement, the origin of Aboriginal culture and even on oc-casions, at least in the fairly recent past, the origin of universal man. Parallel with this is the production of a host of positive identities that fulfil the role of overcoming namelessness, and offer a secure identity, a home, and a foundational history from which to live and die.

Both projects rely on the production of unities, continuities, and an un-folding temporal sequence that stretches back countless thousands of years, to 1788, and up to the present day. Numerous points along this historical chain are being filled in, every detail is being made known, as a definitive Australian bloodline is being constructed and defined against the restoring of the origin. But there is I think an intuition developing that 'something else is going on', something rather subtle, because no matter who is speaking, from where and to whom, there is a suspicion that in the search for origins, and the overcoming of namelessness, there are transmit-ted specific conceptions of subjectivity that are derived from the history of Western philosophy, a history that spans the nodal points of Descartes, Locke and Hegel but which is bridged by continuities, unities, and un-folding temporality and transparency.

The questions that emerge are: where does that leave us now; must we all simply acknowledge that in our theorising we are committed to certain fascist techniques? I do not think this is so. The issue here is, rather, that we might want to examine the use of the great theoretical unities, con-tinuities, temporalities and transparencies, and trace their history, the kinds of relations they allow, and perhaps see if it is possible to develop alternative techniques for our analysis. Until now, I have been strategically looking at part of the history of these themes and their possible inter-

relations, and once again it is important to stress that while they are constitutive elements of fascism, it does not necessarily mean that to use them is to be a fascist, but it is necessary that the theoretical issues they raise are addressed.

So at this point I want to return again to the work of Michel Foucault because, in contrast to his description of the search for origins, he suggests as an alternative a history of descent which he renames genealogy. Foucault argues that the analysis of descent or genealogy is the history of articulating the differences and the disunities that underly the disassociation of self. So 'descent' does not go back in time in an attempt to retrace an unbroken continuity up to the present, but rather disperses history into discontinuous events. As Foucault says:

> ...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 that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents (1980:142).

The object of the genealogical analysis is more often than not the body and everything that comes into contact with it - diet, soil, climate and so on - as the body is itself an inscribed surface of events, and the place of both the disassociation of subjectivity and the disintegration of its own bodily volume. So both the body and the self are not outside history; on the contrary they are the very condition of history as it is history that articulates specific selves and specific bodies; and genealogical history indicates an awareness of this and then makes it the basis of its method.

> Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history's destruction of the body (Foucault, 1980:148).

Finally, Foucault develops the concept of 'emergence' as an instance of arising, not a continuous arising but a momentary instance, not the end of historical development but a transition between points that emerge momentarily from within the play of dominations and subjections. So genealogy and the history of descent do not seek origins, do not offer ultimate meanings, nor continuities, but only trace the play of dominations. Genealogy

> seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations (Foucault, 1980:148).

Foucault brings together the various elements of genealogy under the sign of 'effective' history: history that is without reference to any absolute,

universal or constant, and from which not even the body or subjectivity escapes:

> History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being - as it divides our emotions, dramatises our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy towards its millenial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting (Foucault, 1980:154).

'Effective history' is the history of dispersal, of events, disruptions and discontinuity. It is a history of chance, random events and the analysis of the microcosm, the body, the nervous system; but above all it is a history that revels in its multi-perspectivism. It is a history that acknowledges the perspectivism of the historian's own path of descent. This is exactly what non-effective, non-genealogical history refuses to do. Under the various masks of universal subjectivity, truth, essences, objectivity and facts, social historians deny the specificity of their own bodily existence, their subjectivity and will, in order to uncover the abstract eternal will of history itself which is ultimately reduced to a final cause - Providence, Telos, Progressiveness, or some final absolute meaning and identity.

In drawing this paper to a close I want to restate a couple of points. It is absolutely crucial that a text like *Mein Kampf* is not allowed to remain silent today. We must subject it to detailed analysis if we are ever to come to terms with its themes of racism and fascism. But this coming to terms can only take place if fascism is seen not as a temporary deviance from the 'civilising progression' of Western culture, but as an essential part of the very conception of this 'progression', which we can reconstruct and theorise. But more than this we must analyse our own theoretical methodology. This paper is an attempt to achieve these two aims; perhaps a rather better one is the book *Anti-Oedipus* by Deleuze and Guattari (1977), but it is also very much longer.

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