Introduction

Resistance and Freedom

"How is freedom measured in individuals and peoples?" asks Friedrich Nietzsche. "According to the resistance which must be overcome," he answers, "according to the exertion required, to remain on top."[1] Resistance and freedom on this view are linked both conceptually and practically. To the extent that attempts to build freedom into the social structure miscarry, resistance will arise. The motivation for resistance comes from encountering constraints on freedom. These constraints cannot be absolute, however, and resistance would not be possible unless some degree of freedom remained.

Nietzsche's pithy analysis may provide an answer to the question of what freedom is by showing the conceptual linkage of freedom and resistance. But then the question becomes "What is resistance?" While this question is not a canonical one in the Anglophone tradition, resistance has been a central theme in the political and social theory of a group of French philosophers whose work became influential during the political disturbances of the 1960s and the 1970s. North Americans were quick to label these philoso-

phers 'poststructuralists'—a word that, for reasons that will become apparent, is problematic and finally inadequate in the present-day context. This book is intended as a historical and topical guide through the different ways in which these French philosophers have asked about what resistance is and how it is possible. Nietzsche's deceptively clear answer to these questions will in the end prove to be cogent; however, before his answer can be seen as a prefiguration of poststructuralism, the history of Nietzsche's influence on and reception by Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida must be explained. Note, for instance, that resistance as Nietzsche understands it can go in two directions. The resistance can be to domination, and in the name of emancipation. But it can also be domination's resistance to emancipatory efforts. In the quotation above, Nietzsche uses 'resistance' to refer to the opposition that emancipation meets. In this book, in contrast, I will be using 'resistance' in the sense that is heard most often in connection with poststructural social theory: as the emancipatory resistance to domination. The word 'resistance' does not of itself distinguish between emancipation and domination. That is why I speak of *critical* resistance. Critique is what makes it possible to distinguish emancipatory resistance from resistance that has been co-opted by the oppressive forces.

The critical dimension of poststructuralism is achieved by using the technique that Nietzsche calls *genealogy.* Inherited from Hume,[2] Nietzsche's genealogical analyses are critical in that they identify resistance and analyze the background practices that lead to it. Genealogy is also critical insofar as it suspects that consciousness's sense of freedom hides deeper motivations that call this sense of freedom into question. What seems like freedom at the level of self-consciousness may in effect be a self-denial that grows out of *ressentiment,* a

resentment of oneself that arises because one is not powerful enough, and thus not free enough, to generate one's own values. Genealogy does not deny that there is a level of conscious agency, but it doubts the efficacy and autonomy that self-consciousness attributes to itself. For instance, for Nietzsche early Christianity may think of itself as founded on love for the other, whereas genealogy sees it as growing out of weakness and hate, to the point where it turns on itself in ascetic self-abnegation.

Resistance to power and domination may thus be more complex than it appears on the surface. The social features that are being resisted may produce the shape that resistance takes. Two examples suggested by the political theorist Wendy Brown are workers who dream of a world without work and teenagers who long for a world without parents. These initial imaginings of freedom still presuppose and may even be constrained by the social categories and social identities ("workers," "teenagers") they are trying to resist.[3] Thus, the teenager who imagines a world without parents is in fact still presupposing the subject identity "teenager," and therefore the same social organization that is resented. The general point is that utopian imaginings of freedom may not be aware of the extent to which they presuppose the patterns of oppression that they are resisting. This is not to say that resistance is inevitably ineffectual or hopeless, but it does suggest that resistance is contextually bound to the social and psychological structures that are being resisted. Indeed, drawing a distinction between resistance and compliance would not be possible outside of a given power regime. The particular social structure provides the grid of intelligibility for making sense of the actions as conforming to or dissenting from the given power configuration.

Of course, resistance may try to legitimate itself by appeal to context-transcendent or even to context-independent principles. Abstract universals by themselves, however, do not explain how the situation gives rise to resistance, and they do not address such questions as how the identities (e.g., "worker" or "teenager") that are being resisted were produced in the first place. Abstract principles tend to assume that power can always be distinguished from freedom, and that it makes sense to think of a world of freedom without power. In contrast, from the genealogical perspective domination and resistance are intimately related to each other. The perception of social constraints is itself produced by social constraints, and thus is just as likely to perpetuate these constraints as to escape them.

It is not an accident, therefore, that the theorists I will be examining are not primarily concerned with the specification of universal principles or with the articulation of a theory of justice in the abstract. They are interested in the concrete background from which resistance grows, but they do not necessarily reject universal principles. Nevertheless, the grounds for debate are beginning to be clear. From the poststructural perspective, whatever the theory's aspirations for universality are, principles gain such universality through abstraction and therefore by themselves may seem too thin to be applied concretely. In criticizing the limitations of abstract principles, poststructuralism need not be read as making a complete break with the philosophical tradition. Instead, it can be seen as connecting to a different branch of the tradition, one that is less impressed by the emphasis on formal principles in Plato and Kant than by the focus on concrete phronesis or practical knowledge in Aristotle and Vico.[4] Resistance makes more sense for an approach that starts from the concrete universality of an

actual social group than for one that starts from the abstract universality of formal principles as determined through a thought experiment. Plato's imaginary Republic, Kant's Kingdom of Ends, Rawls's veil of ignorance, and Habermas's ideal speech situation are examples of the rationalist approach. Poststructuralism prefers a genealogical critique that wrestles with the emancipatory potential of the concrete social situation.

In contrast, from the perspective of rationalist theorists who aspire either to global accounts of the end of history or to abstract, universal principles for any and every society, resistance will seem to be too limited a notion. If resistance is itself an effect of the social structure it deplores, these theorists infer, it then lacks the normative content that will guide political action. Such theorists want to know "in the name of what" resistance is justified. Without such a transcendent principle, they fear that practical resistance would degenerate into directionless flailing and childish whining. Not all resistance will strike everyone as justified or emancipatory, so some will feel that more needs to be said about how to distinguish resistance that is emancipatory from other forms, such as resistance that is reactionary. Even those who are sympathetic to poststructuralism may worry that to equate resistance with what is progressive and good is to buy into the standard way of thinking of power as bad and freedom as good, when this dichotomy is part of what is in question.

Hesitations about the normative usefulness of the notion of resistance arise, in short, if resistance is simply reactive. In reacting to domination, resistance may appear to be the act of taking a purely negative position against something, without any substantive vision of what it is for. Resistance can take place without a particular political program, and

it may deny or ignore its own desire for power. Those who are disappointed with resistance as a political activity may feel that, insofar as it is strictly reactive, it lacks a positive vision of what is to be achieved by social change. They feel that resistance stands against, not for. To put the point in Nietzschean language, they fear that resistance knows only how to say "no," not how to say "yes" to a different view of society that would change the status quo.

The challenge in this book is to see whether the various theorists can explain *critical* resistance, and whether their accounts point toward the possibility of resistance that is not merely reactive. The theories and the phenomena that I address here are not infantile outbursts or unthinking reactions. To be critical, resistance must be able to identify its injuries and to articulate its grievances. At the same time, critique that does not lead to engagement in resistant practices seems pointless. To echo Kant, the guiding idea of this book is that critique without resistance is empty and resistance without critique is blind.

Why "Resistance" Now?

Why write a book on resistance at this particular moment? Let me give some examples to show the current need for thinking about resistance in its various dimensions. These examples involve political, social, and ethical resistance. On the overtly political scale, the desire to articulate the nature and possibility of resistance is increasing with the growing dissension nationally and internationally over the policies of the United States in the Middle East and in Asia. There is also the international resistance to the phenomenon known as globalization. Insofar as the globalization is perceived as the expansion of American interests, it is stirring up fears of

exploitation and feelings of resentment among less well off people and nations. These resistance movements call for a better understanding of how resistance is possible.

From a more theoretical standpoint, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have also led to a need to rethink the rhetoric of resistance. With doubts about a philosophy of universal history and its rhetoric of total revolution, ideas such as social class, class struggle, classless society, class consciousness, and ideology are being called into question. In this general sea change, if 'resistance' begins to be heard more often than 'revolution', then its connotations must be clarified.

Another form of resistance involves social movements. Movements that have focused attention on race or on gender and sexuality and movements on behalf of prisoners are examples of a different type of resistance that problematizes social norms and aims at social change. (There is, for instance, a group that works with and for women prisoners and that calls itself, appropriately in my view, "Critical Resistance.") Social resistance may manifest itself in opposition to the ways that institutions shape individuals, but it may also reflect opposition to social policies that shape populations. Examples of the latter would be medical practices and health care. This difference between social forces that shape individuals and social forces that shape populations is the difference between what Foucault calls "disciplinary power" and "bio-power." A major issue here is that one wants to be able to say not only that resistance to different forms of social power has been more effective in some areas than in others, but also that some social movements have led to greater social improvement than others. Poststructural social theory is assumed to have some difficulty in explaining what counts as "improvement" insofar as it denies that

there is a totalizing standpoint from which to judge overall social progress.

Closely related to social resistance yet significantly different is another type of resistance to norms: ethical resistance. Ethical resistance involves the individual more than the institution or the population. It may be the basis for an individual's choice of engaging in social or political resistance. Yet it requires a different kind of explanation. For Emmanuel Levinas, ethical resistance is not the attempt to use power against itself, or to mobilize sectors of the population to exert their political power; the ethical resistance is instead the resistance of the powerless.

Levinas influences Jacques Derrida, who maintains that the paradigm for ethical resistance is such that ethical resistance will inevitably fail. The ultimate resistance is in the face of death. Life can even be defined as the resistance to death. To find examples of ethical resistance, one need not look to experiences of limit situations, as Sartre did in imagining what it was like to be a resistance hero in wartime. A more mundane, less dramatic, but not less heroic example is the day-to-day resistance to decline and death of someone with a serious physical disability or illness, such as polio. This resistance is better described as ethical than as moral, for it shows up in the person's *ethos,* which in this case is the person's perseverance, despite infirmity, in meaningful activities. However, no matter what form ethical resistance takes, it should be thoroughly honest with itself. The ethical resistance must live with its embodied limitations, and in limit situations it may have to acknowledge its powerlessness vis-à-vis that which ultimately cannot be resisted.

Looking ahead to a future that may not come, the analyses in this book anticipate the increasing need to know more exactly what is meant by 'resistance' and how it is possible.

These different kinds of resistance—political, social, and ethical—require different types of explanation. This book is not intended to be a practical guide that will show people how to resist. It does not attempt to tell people what to do. In fact, it is based on the assumption that such a how-to book could not be written. Instead, the book is more concerned with different explanations of the phenomena of resistance. On some critics' constructions, for instance, poststructuralism theorizes power as being so pervasive and insidious that resistance seems to be pointless. Thus, Fredric Jameson warns that Foucault is trapped in a "winner loses" logic.[5] Jameson notes that the more Foucault wins by portraying society as carceral, the more he loses insofar as his critical voice of refusal becomes increasingly paralyzed. This line of criticism was pressed against Foucault's theory of disciplinary power from many sides right at the start. As a result, Foucault immediately began to develop a social ontology to explain how resistance is possible even if there is no "outside" to power that could check power. Pierre Bourdieu offers another sociological model to explain resistance, but it too encounters the criticism that his social ontology makes resistance seem pointless. Bourdieu's notion of the habitus, that is, the set of social dispositions that make us who we are, initially seems to be so constraining that social change would be unlikely or even impossible. Resistance thus becomes a phenomenon that theories emphasizing the social construction of subjects ought to explain. Resistance is both an activity and an attitude. It is the activity of refusal. It is also an attitude that refuses to give in to resignation. Daniel Bensaïd points out in *Résistances* that Gilles Deleuze admired the absolute disobedience of Herman Melville's character Bartleby, who continually responds "I would prefer not to."[6] Bartleby's

employer becomes obsessed with this passive resistance. As Melville explains, an earnest person who prefers an attitude of resignation and submission, will find such passivity at once incomprehensible and aggravating. Whereas resignation abandons possibilities and takes the current social configuration as inevitable, resistance is disconcerting because it challenges standard patterns of behavior. In Melville's story, one side of Bartleby's passive resistance is that it represents a critique of slavish daily subordination. Unlike resignation, resistance can lead to hope—that is, to an openness to the indefinite possibility that things could be different, even if one does not know exactly how.

Derrida also admires Melville's story. In his essay "Resistances," Derrida attests to the special significance that both Bartleby and 'resistance' have for him. The word '*résistance*' is untranslatable, Derrida quips, even into French. "Ever since I can remember," he says, "I have always loved this word."[7] Derrida finds Bartleby to be emblematic not only of resistance generally but, more specifically, of *ethical* resistance, the nonresistance of the powerless even in the face of death.

Resistance can range from the polite demurral of Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" to the in-your-face refusal exemplified by the 1968 slogan "Soyons réalistes, demandons l'impossible!" Slavoj Žižek reasserts this motto at the conclusion of his debate with Judith Butler and Ernesto Laclau.[8] In the present context, to be realist and to demand the impossible means, for Žižek, not to take the globalization of capitalism as the only possibility, but to resist it even when one does not have a better alternative to offer. Daniel Bensaïd, drawing on the work of Françoise Proust, expresses most sharply the issue that I think Deleuze, Derrida, and Žižek are signaling.[9] Their view is that, although resistance should not be blind, agents need not know

explicitly all their reasons and principles in advance. Resistance itself may be required to make explicit through the resulting situation what the motives and grounds for that act of refusal are. On this account, the engaged agents will find out what is possible by seeing what their resistance opens up.

This sequence will undoubtedly appear backward to the more rationalistically inclined social theorists who believe in the primacy of universal principles. These theorists want the agent to articulate the principles that would legitimate the envisioned social change before actually taking social or political action. On their model, the ideal of a society without resistance makes perfectly good sense. In contrast, from the poststructuralist perspective, a society without resistance would be either a harmless daydream or a terrifying nightmare. Dreaming of a society without resistance is harmless as long as the theorist does not have the power to enforce the dream. However, the poststructuralist concern is that, when backed by force, the dream could become a nightmare.

The poststructuralist inability to imagine a society without relations of power has made it the target of Michael Walzer[10] and other critics who view poststructuralism as an expression of the "infantile leftism" that was common in the 1960s. The assumption is that, because the poststructuralists could not imagine a society without power, the poststructuralist attitude is one of resignation and of despair about the possibility of social improvement. However, it is less often noticed that Foucault could not imagine a society without resistance. Insofar as resistance harbors hopes for social amelioration, poststructuralism therefore is mischaracterized by the charge that it is resigned to the status quo.

In all fairness to the universalist, however, it must be acknowledged that resistance, if it starts from the situation,

should not limit itself to tactical assessment or to merely instrumental reasoning about how best to achieve the social goals. In addition to tactical assessment, there should be critical assessment of the goals. In this kind of critical assessment, there may even be a need to reflect on and to posit universal principles. Thus, even if the universalist mischaracterizes the poststructuralist position, it does not follow that the universalist is misguided. Which position is better and what 'better' could even mean are questions that can be raised once the different theoretical stances are properly characterized. In this book, my aim is to present a balanced characterization of the poststructuralist position. The debate with the universalist is worked out at length in *Critical Theory,* which I co-authored with Thomas McCarthy.[11] The present book is a "prequel" to *Critical Theory.*

The Plan of the Book

I realize that the concern for the problem of resistance may seem like a strange French import. However, a premise of this book is that resistance is a recognizable topic that deserves systematic attention. To introduce the perhaps unfamiliar idea of theorizing resistance, the book is organized as follows.

The first three chapters develop and consider attempts to construct a "social ontology" that will explain how resistance is possible. By this I mean a theoretical model of the salient features of the social configuration. Different theorists will offer differing models, and these models are not to be taken as having metaphysical or foundationalist necessity. One especially Nietzschean feature that is found in some of these social ontologies is an interest in the body rather than in self-consciousness as the source of resistance.

I label this interest in the body "Nietzschean" because it represents a departure from the Kantian and Hegelian identification of freedom and rational self-consciousness. In contrast to Kantians and Hegelians, who believe that freedom and autonomy require rational self-transparency, Nietzscheans think that much of what we do is conditioned by embodied social background practices that we do not and perhaps cannot bring fully to consciousness. Theorists subscribing to embodiment differ, however, on the degree of the opacity of these background practices. There will be room for disagreement in the following pages about just how opaque we are to ourselves and as to what this opacity implies for our capabilities as ethical, political, and social agents. Thus, in addition to laying out these differing theories and methodologies, I will also be exploring the normative application of these social ontologies.

For this investigation of the social ontology of resistance, I have chosen as paradigms Foucault and Bourdieu in addition to Nietzsche. That these three should be grouped together is not obvious, and indeed there are some strong tensions that result from trying to relate them. However, the Nietzsche that I am presenting first is a "French Nietzsche"—that is, an interpretation of Nietzsche that sees him as offering a philosophy of interpretation. His genealogical strategy is not only an interpretive approach to cultural and social practices; it also offers an explanation of the basis and effects of interpretation itself. A theory that defends the interpretive character of understanding will be pluralist. By this I mean that the monistic ideal of the one right understanding that explains all the data and observations will be displaced by an openness to the possibility of plural understandings.

Chapter 1 reconstructs the history of Nietzsche's influence on and reception by French poststructuralism. The change

in French philosophy that takes place in the 1960s and the 1970s as the poststructuralist paradigm replaces the phenomenological paradigm is charted by exploring a series of readings of Nietzsche by Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Sarah Kofman, and Eric Blondel. On these French readings of Nietzsche that see him as a pluralist, the body is seen precisely as the locus of the competing alternative interpretations. These readings of Nietzsche are shown to go hand in hand with the development of the poststructuralist paradigm of philosophy that emerged during that period. The chapter pays particular attention to Nietzsche's aphoristic style and genealogical approach as well as to his central ideas, such as the will to power.

Displacing the Cartesian metaphors of consciousness with a pluralist understanding of the body begins the dismantling of Cartesian assumptions that is required if one is to think in terms of Foucault's social ontology. Foucault turns Nietzschean genealogy into a strategy for reading the history of the social and cultural practices of embodiment and the changes in subjectivity that take place over time. Chapter 2 investigates how Foucault's analyses of disciplinary power and bio-power allow for the possibility of critical resistance. For Foucault, all domination is power, but not all power is domination. Therefore, Foucault can be critical of domination without abandoning his theory that power relations are inevitable. If subjects are socially constructed through what Foucault calls governmentality, critique works by a process that he calls desubjectification or desubjugation. Critique does not tell people who they really are and what they ought to do. Instead, in Foucault's hands, critique challenges their understanding of who they are, and it leads them to resist their attachment to their social identities and ideals. This chapter also explains some frequently over-

looked differences between disciplinary power and biopower, and it discusses Judith Butler's informative answer to the Foucaultian question "Why resist?"

One difficulty that arises with the Nietzschean emphasis on the historical malleability of subjectivity and embodiment is that pluralism seems to turn into sheer, unconstrained proliferation. The task then becomes to explain why a thousand possibilities are not simply actualized, andwhy instead societies manage to be fairly stable. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of the stabilizing habitus is the focus of chapter 3. Bourdieu's notions of the habitus and the field are shown to follow from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as do Bourdieu's views that (contrary to Sartre) there is no radical freedom and that Merleau-Ponty is right that freedom is always situated. Bourdieu distinguishes agents from subjects and theorizes the practical sense of the former. He thinks that language is not autonomous from power, and he thus criticizes both Jacques Derrida and J. L. Austin for playing down the role of social power. At the same time, Bourdieu rejects Jürgen Habermas's search for universally legitimating principles in the ideal speech situation. For both Foucault and Bourdieu, power works best when it is invisible. When power becomes visible precisely as domination, it provokes resistance.Bourdieu argues that his method of reflexive socio-analysis reveals the arbitrariness of social relations scientifically, and thus that it makes resistance genuinely critical.

Another tool for critical resistance is deconstruction. Derrida himself sometimes calls his enterprise a deconstructive genealogy. In chapter 4, questions come up about the foundations of ethics—more precisely, about whether ethics requires a foundation. I use 'ethics' broadly to refer to obligations that present themselves as necessarily to be

fulfilled but that are neither forced on one nor enforceable. In particular, I investigate the *ethical* resistance that comes not from power but from lack of power. The resistance of the completely powerless Other is perhaps paradoxically the most powerful form that resistance can take. Levinas's writings on the face of the Other and Derrida's meditations on the relevance of death to ethics are signs of the ethical turn in Continental philosophy that occurs in the 1980s and the 1990s. This ethical turn may well have been a result of criticisms of poststructuralism for being at least inattentive to and at worst unable to explain normative issues. If there is to be a deconstructive genealogy, it must provide at least some examples of how it understands itself in relation to ethics.

Chapter 5 explores poststructuralism's abstention from critical theory's use of both the method of *Ideologiekritik* and the idea of ideology as false consciousness. Foucault and Bourdieu both shun the notion of ideology because of its association with false consciousness, and Derrida thinks that the word 'ideology' has been used up, like a coin on which the faces have been worn smooth. Although the post-Marxists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe retain the concept of ideology, they do so by challenging the idea of society. On their account, the belief in fixed social structures is what is illusory or ideological, and society is really an infinite play of differences. The chapter then shows how Slavoj Žižek's first major book in English radically altered the terrain of the debate. For Žižek ideology is not a mask that conceals social reality. Indeed, to continue to speak of 'ideology' is possible only if the term can be freed from the representationalism that depends on the epistemological contrast between ideological illusion and reality or the true state of affairs. The book ends by considering the claim that a com-

bination of deconstruction and genealogy is a valid and effective tool for critical resistance, and that it may well be the best tool that is currently available.

At the end of each chapter I include reflections that transcend poststructuralism and that therefore require another label. I propose 'post-critique' as the label not only for what comes after poststructuralism, but also as a substitute for 'poststructuralism.' To explain this substitution, let me emphasize again that poststructuralism is only a term of convenience for classifying French philosophers whose work became important as the influence of the structuralist human sciences declined. However, as soon as structuralism is no longer a contender, the designator 'poststructuralism' also loses its contrast class and ceases to have a point. Historically, only the period from about 1962 to about 1984, the year of Foucault's death, could be identified as poststructuralist. However, the philosophers classified as poststructuralists would not have accepted that label, just as most of them did not want to be identified as postmodernists. Their predecessors, the philosophers who were doing phenomenology, did have an explicit investment in that recognizable research program. Even so, in addition to phenomenology, other philosophical programs, including hermeneutics and critical theory, were live options at the time. Perhaps no single term can be expected to cover all the disparate styles of philosophizing in a particular period. But at least 'post-critique' is flexible enough to cover a wide range of work in Continental philosophy since 1984, and even since 1962.

Though post-critique may appear to be a short form for 'post-*critical theory*,' post-critique need not think of itself as the legacy of Frankfurt School critical theory exclusively. For instance, the social theorists Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Ernesto Laclau have shown that they can engage one

another in productive discussion even if they diverge in their intellectual provenance and their theoretical commitments. Therefore, a flexible label is required to show that they share enough of a paradigm to interact with one another. 'Post-critique' is sufficiently flexible to include them, and also to include, for example, other current social theorists who are investigating race and gender.

Labels come and go, however, and this book may turn out to be the only exemplar of the genre of post-critical social theory. At least, that is the rubric under which I turn to the specific philosophers who best exemplify it. Let me caution in advance, however, that the accounts of resistance offered by these divergent theorists cannot be synthesized in some super-theory of what resistance really is. At best, each account can be tested against itself and its immediate neighbors to see whether it explains how resistance can be critical. Moreover, there is the further question of how critical resistance can be socially and ethically effective in particular situations. Whether philosophy should even hope to be able to answer this question is debatable. Foucault would have urged people to find their own practical answers to it, but not to expect philosophy to legislate *the* answer. Though some will bemoan this attitude as an impoverishment of philosophy, others will share Foucault's view that philosophy should not presume "to dictate 'what is to be done.' "[12] However far these questions about critical resistance are taken, I hope to have shown that discussion should include, and could well begin from, the theories I investigate here.