ON LESSING'S BRIEFING FOR A DESCENT INTO HELL AND MICHEL FOUCAULT'S POWER

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Abstract

In George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, fear for modernity and post-war anxiety is visually and psychologically constructed within the framework of a totalitarian state. I would argue that in Doris Lessing's Briefing for a Descent into Hell such fear has transformed or permeated into our society in greater extent than its predecessor in which our individuality has been lost and subsequently humans would succumb to an "altered reality" that is prevalent in the post-modern world. I would demonstrate Lessing's strategies in achieving such horror by utilizing Michel Foucault's notion of power.

Key words: *anxiety, psychologically constructed, individuality, Doris Lessing, Michel Foucault*

INTRODUCTION

Briefing for a Descent into Hell is a haunting prophecy about an intellectual, Charles Watkins who has finally lost his consciousness and succumbed to the "reality" created by the hospital staff and professionals under the expectations of our society. In a sense, the kind of tolerance or limits of tolerance are, as the story progresses, further extended and/or consolidated by the absolute authoritative power that has been exerted onto the protagonist's body and mind causing him to break down and become somewhat fragmented in terms of rationality and self-identity. Though such subject-power phenomenon is well explained in Michel Foucault's "the objectivizing of the subject" in *Power* (Faubion 1984, p. 326), it is never depicted in such minute details especially from the first-person point of view. Through various methods of corporal as well as psychological "rectifications", a well-established character and a man of prominence and repute crumbles down and eventually makes his *descent* and landing on his "altered consciousness" and believes he is truly "cured" and thus saved. The reader seems to plunge deep into the strata of the protagonist's mind and see the many disillusions he experiences as he is being "healed". Conversely, we know that his condition is actually aggravating and he is about to hit the dead-end of his consciousness and embrace a brand-new world of his distorted or "restored" psyche rather and in the end a complete loss of self-hood. In the following essay I will be demonstrating this conception and illustrating with textual evidence along with Foucault's notions of power (or "power-relations") in an effort to show their parallels as well citing some of the ideas from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the counterpart in contrast with the main novel.

1. THE JOURNEY BEGINS

In *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, the protagonist Charles Watkins takes a journey into the "inner dimension" (of his psyche) in an effort to retrieve *something* that has long been forgotten. This *something* is, though not overtly stated in the novel, the self-truth (or "self-will") that he is due to convey to the reader. During the course of his voyage, the reader learns that the "gods" have chosen him to be one of the "Descents" or at least he firmly believes - one of those explorers put on Planet Earth "to keep alive, in any way possible, the *knowledge* that humanity, with its fellow creatures, the animals and plants, make up a whole, are a unity, have a function in the whole system as an organ or organism" (Lessing 1971, pp. 132-34). From the above quote, a sense of harmony between man and Nature is clearly emphasized and secured with a clear objective of the Mission to Planet Earth -

keeping the *knowledge* (the truth to all) shared by all forms of creatures and organisms *alive.* At first, Watkins is presented as someone who is uncertain of the nature of his quest and feels guilty as well as confounded because he has forgotten *something* that is quite precious to him. We find him, then, desperately trying to recover the *knowledge* imprinted in his mind. Through painstaking search for the "imprints" of memory and knowledge, the reader sees and witnesses his efforts to be in vain. According to Nancy T. Bazin, "Watkins fails ultimately to retrieve this *information* because two insensitive psychiatrists refuse to allow him to do what he believes will allow him to 'remember' and so complete his 'voyage'" (1980, p.11). Moreover, represented as "social orders and law enforcers", the doctors treat Watkins as an amnesiac who must be "re-molded" or "revamped" to recall from a different and somewhat alien perspective—his *absurd* roles as unappreciated husband, father, lover, and colleague. Thus, various types of treatments for his "cure" are implemented by these professionals or rather "truth-erasers" as I would like to call them to repress and/or "redress" Watkins as a subject and to seclude him from his *inner power* (self-truth and knowledge) by engaging him in *faked* "social existence and/or social status", about which he had many doubts in the past. Unsurprisingly, during his stay in the hospital, the psychiatrists have tried to hinder and diminish his consciousness/ego rather than help him reach the goal of self-realization. For example, once when he recalls his mission—"It's knowing, Harmony. God's law. That's what it is. Let me ... let me ... I must ... let me get up"—the doctor tells him, "Now now shhhhhh, don't get so excited, there's a good chap" (Lessing p. 143). In short, these seeming doctors exert forces of social rigidity, passivity, as well as "normality" onto those "who seem 'mad' and who are essentially alone in their efforts to re-establish contact with what is sane" (Bazin 1980, p.11). Ostensibly, the role of doctors is carefully manipulated and altered to give the reader maximum effect of horror since it is contradictory to the "normal" assumption that doctors are benign figures. Moreover, the idea of Oneness - the seamless integration of an individual and the Society is ironically constructed and pervasive throughout the novel by continually supplementing uneasy, even disturbing scenes of "far-fetched and painful wakefulness" and "the state of being drugged to sleep". One of the exemplary scenes can be observed in the following passage.

> Give me pills, give me more pills. I MUST SLEEP.
>
> No, I don't enjoy my nights reading thinking talking and simply being alive, no, I want to sleep, I have to sleep (p. 139).

As demonstrated above, for Watkins, thus, it may be easier to succumb to the unceasing battles of "staying awake", connoting the idea that gaining *truth and knowledge* is far less likely than being exposed to all forms of medical treatments and/or sleep deprivation aiming to eradicate his true identity and self-consciousness. To put it more plainly, Lessing questions and investigates in the existence and present practice of coercion and control of the Society done to any individuals through "fake-truth" propagandized by the so-called "professionals" and the debilitating effects it has brought to the well-being or soundness of *individuality* rather than any given society as a whole.

2. ON LESSING'S STRATEGIES

While Lessing stresses on the breakdown of individual's inner psyche, she also endeavors to anchor on the effects of interconnections between subject-formation and power-knowledge as well as to show the reader the force of exertion (of authority) on *individuals* through a network of various disciplinary and regulatory power from which one can hardly escape. In Foucault's term, as he states that "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations" (Faubion 1984, p. 329). In the novel, however, the reader is not presented with much evidence of resistance, as opposed to external forces, but more of observations and scrutiny of Watkins's inner psyche made possible by the vivid descriptions of his sleep state or the unconsciousness - chiefly manifested by the drifting scenes to various islands or seashores and the various encounters with many exotic animals and creatures.

> I was standing on a wide beach of white sand that stretched on either side for a couple of miles before curving out of sight behind rocky headlands... The sands glittered. It was a

> scene of great calm and plenty and reassurance, but at the same time, there was a confusion of light. (Lessing, p. 36)
>
> I decided to watch night fall beside my friends the great colored beasts, ... where they had shown me how to scramble over the impassable glass... I was melancholy enough to cry, or to hide my head under a blanket—if I had got one, and slide my sadness into a regression from the light. (pp. 46-47)

By using these powerful metaphorical settings and figures, both concrete and illusory, Lessing is able to show the most feared state of human psyche, namely the powerlessness and helplessness of individuals that is executed or carried out usually by authoritative forces/figures which in turn make their escape to "freedom", implying the right frame of mind or rationality difficult or seemingly impossible to achieve.

> I can feel myself struggling and fighting as if I were sunk a mile deep in thick dragging water but far above my head in the surface shallows I can see sun-lanced waves where the glittering fishes... I fight to rise, I struggle as if I were a mile under heavy sour black earth... No, no, no, don't. I won't, I don't want, let me wake, I must wake up, but...Shhhhhh, hush, SLEEP (pp. 140-41)

One of the critical features of Lessing's writing is that she usually tries to consider individual consciousness in terms of its connection with the larger system—social, political, or psychological—scenes of human efforts emerging from her novels continually suggest the "smallness (or triviality) and weakness of individual human beings" (Kaplan 1973, p. 538). In other words, to be more precise, the unequal attention/balance has been purposely placed between the repressors—the hospital staff and doctors and the wronged victim, our professor Charles Watkins. Such unequal distribution of power along with the careful elimination of resistance allows the reader to perceive the fact that the outward forces have surmounted the *intrinsic power* or the free-will of our "patient" and taken absolute control of him, like a puppet master to his marionette. Lessing also notes "the main feature of these human beings as at present constituted being their *inability* to feel, or understand themselves, in any other way except through their own drives or functions" (1971, p.141). Though she criticizes the many social "parameters" to control and manipulate individuals, she takes blame on them for *not* feeling enough or showing sympathy and respect to fellow human beings. Evidently, Lessing makes a strong call to awaken those who "have not yet evolved into an understanding of their individual selves as merely parts of a whole, first of all humanity, their own species, let alone achieving a conscious knowledge of humanity as part of Nature; plants, animals, birds, insects, reptiles, all these making a small chord in the Cosmic Harmony" (Lessing, pp. 128-29). Moreover, the anxiety and tension experienced by Watkins can be further illustrated by the images of celestial stars, such as the moon and sun in particular.

> The moon held me, the moon played with me, the moon and I seemed to breathe as one, for my waking and sleeping, or rather, being wakeful and then dreaming, not the same thing, was set by the moon's direct pressure on my eyes ... to the sun, so that great Sun and minute Moon stared at each other direct... I was moonstruck. I was moon-crazed (Lessing, p. 56).

Again, to reinstate Watkins's consciousness would be equal to overshadow the sun's mighty power in contrast with the moon's petty or even trivial influence, signifying that it is virtually impossible for any individual to fight back the collective, institutionalized social "system" or machine. It is fair, therefore, to give credit to Lessing for her outstanding craftsmanship of "social fear" and human frailty/weakness and manipulability as far as *individuality* is concerned. The undertone here, however, would be that the subtlety and splendor of human will or humanness can never be underestimated.

3. ON PSYCHIATRIC POWER

In *Briefing,* schemes of exertion or coercion of power (on Watkins) fits quite nicely in Foucault's notion of "power exercise" (Lagrange & Davidson 2006, p. 15) in which "one should think of it as 'physical exercise of an unbalanced force', but a force that acts within 'a rational, calculated, and

controlled game of the exercise of power'" (p. 15).

> Instead of conceptualizing psychiatric power in terms of institutions, with their regularities and rules, one has to understand psychiatric practice in terms of *imbalance of power* with the tactical uses of "network, currents, relays, points of support, differences of potential" that characterizes a form of power (p. 15)

In Lessing's novel, the reader sees clearly the scenes and exercises of such "imbalance of power" in the Central Intake Hospital and a sense of anxiety or the mental state of paranoia of Charles Watkins which altogether create an atmosphere of suffocating gloominess.

> I've been robbed of sense. I've been made without resource. I have become inflexible in a flux. When I was on the Good Ship Lollipop, I was held there by wind and sea. When I was on the raft, there was nobody there but me. On this rock I'm fast. Held. I can't do more than hold on. And wait. Or plunge like a diver to the ocean floor ... (Lessing, p. 33)

The intense feeling of being destitute and abandoned abruptly yet incessantly strikes the man. The images of the Good Ship Lollipop and the rock could well "symbolize the last pieces of good memories or perhaps, metaphorically, the very pieces of Watkins's individual objectivity" (Lagrange & Davidson 2006, pp. 332-34) that are left in him and will soon be washed away by various systematic medical treatments. Ironically, such *system* that "kills" or "effaces" individual objectivity (or self-identity) is created and most trusted by people who endow it with absolute power and agree upon it. In other words, the *system* is protected and sheltered within our own ideologies upon our consensus. According to Foucault, therefore,

> the individual as abstract subject, defined by individual rights that no power can limit unless agreed by contract. And then, beneath this, alongside it, there was the development of a whole disciplinary technology [exercise of system] that produced the individual as historical reality ... This individual is a subjected body held in a system of supervision and subjected to procedures of normalization (Lagrange & Davidson 2006, p. 57)

In my opinion, the above passage fits perfectly to Lessing's creation of Charles Watkins as well as her intent underlying the many seemingly illusory scenes in her novel. The question of individuality or individual objectivity versus a collective network of ideologies, values, and belief systems is the ultimate challenge/dilemma for human beings. What defines an individual as *human*? Are we all not screws in a big machine? If the machine fails, would the "screws" be of any other use? Take the notion of war for example, as Foucault poses the fundamental questions.

> When, how and why did someone come up with the idea that it is sort of uninterrupted battle that shapes peace, and that the civil order—its basis, its essence, its essential mechanisms—is basically an order of battle? Who came up with the idea that the civil order is an order of battle? Who saw war just beneath the surface of peace ... the principle that allows us to understand order, the State, its institutions, and its history? (Morton & Bygrave 2008, p. 14).

Foucault, to certain extent, pushes the notion of war and peace (or chaos and order) to its limits by asking *who* constitutes order, what an order is, and how it came about. Given the evidence presented, I believe that Lessing in her novel reverberates on many of Foucault's principal thoughts and beliefs.

4. MORE ON FOUCAULT'S POWER

Furthermore, Foucault rejected the idea that "there could be an outside of power, since resistance can only take place from inside a complex web in which resistance and power, strategies of liberation and subjection, substantialization (or concretization) and the logic of becoming, are interwoven" (Venn & Terranova 2009, p. 9). In other words, to Foucault, the power of resistance must come from within and from the very "inner circle of power" within which many forms of exercise of power, such as rationalization, normalization, and conformation can take effect. And according to Penny Powers's analysis on Foucault's view of resistance, "where there is power, there is resistance that is implicit to

the situation" (Powers 2007, p. 31). To Powers, "resistance plays the role of adversary, target and support for power. "Power and resistance both constitute and are constituted by each other. They are each defined by reference to one another" (2007, p. 31). In other words, "power and resistance" must go hand in hand with each other and one can not exist without the other. They are, in a sense, like the two sides of a coin that can and must "coalesce to form large rebellions or radical ruptures... Resistance works against power and can shift the tensions and create new alliances and fractures" (2007, p. 31). Hence, by presenting Watkins's psychological state in vast ocean scenes of drifting on a raft while being physically confined in the mental hospital, Lessing is able to cut short the possibilities of Watkins resisting the external forces exerted on him both corporally and psychologically so that the resistance is put to the minimum when confronting the unequal, mighty system of ideologies reenacted by hospital staff and anonymous doctors, namely Doctors X, Y, Z. To me the central gist of Lessing's powerful writing rests not so much on its descriptive element, but on the preciseness of the disproportionality of power relations. To put this more simply, the scale (of individuality or individual objectivity) is tilted waywardly toward the "social machine" or more euphemistically if I may, the well-being of a society, which has long been a concern for the Utilitarianists ever since the Industrial Revolution. In a word, the peril of losing one's individuality or sense of self is so great that Lessing ends the story with a sarcastic tone of Watkins being "remedied" and thus "back to his normalcy", implying that a complete erasure of human consciousness and/or individuality has been secured.

5. MORE ON DORIS LESSING

Moreover, Lessing also hints at the notion that individuals would have to admit that all people (or all forms of life by and large) are interdependent and that each must then be cared for and not regarded as "Other" or "alien"; accordingly, humankind is greatly dependent upon nature and therefore people must not destroy or pollute it. Human beings would have to perceive themselves as part of an organic unity or Cosmic Harmony, and as part of that unity, all barriers based upon class, race, or sex would have to be eliminated. During Watkins's voyage into inner space, he suddenly sees humankind as the gods do: human beings, who believe themselves "normal", are in fact "mad" for refusing to become "we": "saying I, I, I, I, is their madness.., for these microbes are a whole, they form a unity, they have a single mind, a single being, and never can they say I, I, without making the celestial watchers roll with laughter or weep with pity" (Lessing 1971, p. 109). Watkins describes the current situation and recognizes that this "divorce" between "I" and "we" is rapidly moving us toward a "catastrophe"—the destruction of all life forms.

> Some sort of a *divorce* there has been somewhere along the path of this race of man between the "I" and the "We," some sort of a terrible falling-away, and I (who am not I, but part of a whole composed of other human beings as they are of me) ..., feel as if I am spinning back...into a vortex of terror, like a birth in reverse, and it is towards a catastrophe (1971, p. 109).

The fear, disillusionment, and perhaps fragmentation of Watkins's inner psyche or "the self" are clearly presented in the above passage. There is, however, hope or salvation after all which is described as "the Crystal" that possesses all the calming, pain-absorbing, and knowledge-yielding effects for our victim as described below.

> There was a pressure of silence, which swirled me into a singing calm. I was inside the Crystal, whose vortex has gathered in all sensation as a dust devil gathers in dust and leaves ... for the beginning of my being absorbed into the Crystal was a darkness of mind coupled with a vividness of sense that only slowly I was able to balance (Lessing, p. 92).

The symbol of the *Crystal* can then be interpreted as a place of salvation or an intersection of harmony in which Watkins can seek shelter. In it, he is to be nourished and comforted by "the knowledge of the moon and its need" and to become "whole" (p. 108). The shape and "subtle" influence the Moon give rise to the absolute truth/knowledge of the *Crystal* which Lessing urges "feeble" individuals to obtain for it provides shelter and protection from external malignant assimilation/conformity of ideologies or "false beliefs", assuming to be the counterpart of the Moon in our society. On the one hand, it is clever

of Lessing to utilize such images of nature, such the Moon, the sun as well as other planetary bodies as "vehicle of communication" in her novel and the effects are profound. To Lessing, the absolute truth/knowledge that one seeks ought to be "*Crystal*-clear", unobstructed to all humankind, and perhaps transparent and reflective in all aspects, resembling physical qualities of crystal in nature. With such aspirations, Lessing on the other hand does not overlook the practicality of one's living, which in her opinion teems with woe and suffering trying to escape from their past. Generally speaking, the hardships and struggling of human existence are in no way diminished if not overlooked. An example of which would be the drowning kitten abandoned in a "slippy-sided zinc pail" from which it struggled desperately but was unable to shun its doom.

Throughout her novel, Lessing demonstrates repeatedly to the reader that the presiding forces - the power demonstrated by the doctors to alter one's reality work very aggressively and effectively for the destruction or "re-construction" if put more euphemistically rather than preservation of individuality in society. According to Lessing, then, she views today's human beings as "fragile" or "easily swayed" and believes that the "needed awakening" has a better chance of happening through other means of communication, such as dreams, the development of extrasensory perception (ESP), and the exploration of "inner space" (Vlastos 1976, p.252) since she also stresses much on human interactions and channels of communication. To Lessing, hope is always *accessible* and may lie in the waves of human revolts and historical events or in a contingency that will give human beings increased control over these little understood sources of knowledge. In short, though human beings are faced with dire situations in the 20thC onward, "you'll find [salvation] all there, when you need it" (Lessing, pp. 133-34).

6. LESSING & R.D. LAING

At the end of the novel Watkins "awakens" to the sterile "hell" of modern society which exemplifies R.D. Laing's description of the normal state of modern man as "the condition of alienation, of being sleep, of being unconscious, of being out of one's mind" (Laing 1960, p. 256). It is not surprising to notice a striking similarity between Lessing's thoughts and the views of R.D. Laing, an unorthodox psychiatrist and cultural theoretician. Because of the conjunction of their insights, it is extremely helpful, perhaps even necessary, to study Laing along with Lessing. In Laing's view,

> Madness functions in two ways to reveal society to itself. First, the mad person embodies in grotesquely exaggerated forms society's self-division; and second, in the heights and depths of his nature the mentally ill individual participates in those realms of existence that conventional man has either denied or never known (Vlastos 1976, p. 246).

In short, Laing sees madness as "comprehensible transition" and thus it is essential to understand the mad person as symptom and as victim of a "sick" society and finally as prophet or even curer of a possible "new" world, a world governed by forces of unity rather than of separation (p. 246). Thus, by the same token, Lessing uses Charles Watkins as a vehicle of transport/communication to show his mental state as well as the kinds of medical treatments through which he has been put. In essence, Lessing and Laing are saying that "individuals are sick because the world [around them] is *sick*" for they believe not so much "in hearts" as Charles Dickens and other realist novelists, such as Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters in the nineteenth century do, but rather in the "human psyches" that are often *tainted*, *distorted*, or *traumatized* in some way due to social/societal coercion or imposition especially in the early 20th century as demonstrated in the novel. More precisely, both Lessing and Laing delve into the connections between what human beings are in their innermost selves and how they are expected and perceived to behave collectively in a larger picture. For example, in *Briefing*, Professor Watkins serves most evidently as a vehicle that takes the reader, side by side into the journey of his inner psyche bombarded primarily with *fear* and other kinds of ordeals and experiences he has confronted. As a reader, I see how Lessing experiments on him very genuinely and truthfully as if I were the spectator. As a result, both Lessing and Laing share similarities and common grounds in exploring the human mind in such great depth.

7. FOUCAULT & ORWELL

Interestingly enough, when comparing Lessing's novel with Orwell's *1984* we see major differences though both pieces are worthy of applying Foucault's theories of power relations. Being a predecessor to *Briefing*, *1984* demonstrates to the reader all kinds of control, surveillance, propaganda, and brain-washing techniques that are done to an individual, Winston, the protagonist. In this sense, it is more of a "linear force of exertion (or coercion)" characterized by harsh penalties and excruciation. However, the modern forms of power have shifted their positions from the perspectives of mere control and destruction (of individuals or a particular group of people) to the making of a specific kind of power which people, consciously or unconsciously *desire*. In other words, the "order and play" of power has pervaded through the hands of the "right" people, such as Charles Watkins and the educated and perhaps the middle class (or institutions) thus making the role of the state (or government de facto) an initiator or a catalyst to the whole process of change and transition. More specifically as a current trend, the *power of control* is no longer in the hands of the Big Brother or the elite or intellectual, but has permeated through every walk of society and scattered throughout every institution (or individual). Such notion is confirmed by Foucault's ideas—"what distinguishes modern forms of power are their propensities to 'make' life as opposed to 'taking' of life and the 'letting' life that characterized pre-modern forms of power" (Reid 2008, p. 16). In other words, people nowadays have the will in taking initiatives of creating the kind of power that they want to hold onto - thus "making life" instead of passively accepting what is given as in pre-modern societies. In Foucault's theory, these mechanisms of control depicted in *1984* are "disciplinary techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities" (Foucault 1995, p. 207). Personally I feel the term "multiplicities" quite intriguing and I think "multiplicities" here denote diversity of free human thoughts rather than human differences. Such mechanisms of control, according to Foucault, hold three primary purposes—"first, to obtain the exercise of power to the lowest possible cost; second, to bring the effects of this social power to their maximum intensity and to extend them as far as possible; third, to increase both the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system" (p. 207). Evidently, the methods of control depicted in *1984* amply fulfill the requirements of what Foucault thinks of the "purpose and effects" of such strategies and exercises of power. Together, the notions of control in *1984* and theories of power of Foucault serve as cornerstones in helping the reader examine more closely the exuberance of Lessing's textual wonder in carrying out her central idea that such *fear and control* in the post-modern society have pervaded us all, which in turn reinforces Foucault's thoughts.

8. CONCLUSION & AFTERTHOUGHT

Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* marks a new era of psychological fears that are permeating through the 20th century modern society. Unlike her predecessor George Orwell, she is even more willing in investigating the mental state of "the victim of society"—Charles Watkins by utilizing three medical experts, Doctors X, Y, Z who serve different functions in "treating" their patient in an effort to engage in public consciousness and gain consensus. To some extent, the horror of vision about the future implied in *Briefing* seems much more plausible and haunting than a direct punishment resulted from panoptic control employed by the Big Brother. Or perhaps we should now call Doctors X, Y, Z the "Big Doctors" for the effects on the patient they have performed. Overall speaking, Lessing has presented to us a "dormant power of terror", which could easily tear people apart, mentally and/or psychologically that is looming in our society and the general public has ironically accepted or is unaware of it. To be more pictorial, "the evil" is now in a cloak of knowledge and expertise that any resistance is regarded as symptom of illness and requires immediate treatment. The vastness/extensiveness and permeability of such destructive power to individual's objectivity or self-identity (or self-will) is, in my opinion, what Lessing really wants to hint at (or accentuate) and use the novel as a precautionary tale. In her novel, she is able to break through and leap into the future and warn us of *true* events that occur in our daily lives. Because of such a commitment to delving into the suffered mind (of Charles Watkins) and uncovering connections within layers of society, Lessing is not only regarded as social analyst but social visionary or prophet of the contemporary culture. And the relationship between Lessing and Laing prompts even more intriguing commonality as the

following quote illustrates:

> To sum up, both Lessing and Laing hold the views that the principle of compartmentalization, [segregation of certain groups of people] usually takes the form of separating *them* from *us* in obviously spurious (superficial) moral terms. Not only do we divide up humanity into "The Reds, the Whites, the Blacks, the Jews" etc., but we make a false and fatal "absolute separation" between the sane and the insane (Vlastos 1976, p. 249).

After all, both of them acknowledge the problems and strive for some solution that might be a good fit for our society. Yet again, the question comes back as to "who gets to draw the line" and all of a sudden it flashes back to Foucault's principle of power relations and/or the concept of power-knowledge—power produces knowledge that produces action or people are better off being "a happy limbo of non-identity or anonymity" (Prozorov 2007, p. 53) as Foucault's thought on freedom conveys. It is perhaps also one of the inherent themes that as we pride much on freedom, democracy, and individuality nowadays, the counter-forces such as surveillance and global terrorism are also thriving. The question would then be "Can human beings really be *free*? Or is 'freedom or democracy' in fact a more subtle form of *control*?"

All in all, Lessing also seems to say that in the current trend of progression/modernization we are losing *something* in the course of it. *Something* that is not necessarily being deprived of as in the previous generations, but vanishes from within our own consciousness and sense of rationality—a sense of wonder and curiosity, a delight in discovery, a moment of peace, an "inner space" into which arts, culture, education, love can sneak that altogether adhere to form a "genuine *being*" driven by authentic experiences of life. Although Lessing's novel draws on aspects of human/psychological fear, its themes and the scope of knowledge it touches and surveys are rather encompassing that urge future generations to hold on to faith and believe that the ultimate good of humanity is yet to come in times of turmoil and ordeals.

Last but not least, in our increasingly stressed world full of shadowy relationships, frantic emotions and virtual (or hollow) experiences acquired from instant messaging, the sense of alienation and a craving for attention are indeed the essences of modernism. All the debates about consciousness, madness, rationality, and alienation resolve into this single pivot of basic humanity and whether humanity can work together to survive modernism. It is the fundamental debate for mankind. Lessing's novel points to the question and manifests it wholly but, in the end, even Lessing herself, dodges the answer or better yet that is her real intent to leave it open for the reader to ponder and explore.

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