

## 2. The Privacy Paradox

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Perhaps the most important legacy of Foucault and postmodernism is to have made the business of critique much more difficult and complicated than it was back in the days when all workers wore white hats and all capitalists black. Today one has become wary of seeing any cultural, social, or political value as simply good in itself and worthy of protection, without investigating the extent to which it participates, however unwittingly, in a larger regime of a certain kind of knowledge and power. Hegel long ago pointed out that the master and the slave need each other. Each helps to make the other who he/she is. They work together in order to construct and maintain a certain regime of knowledge and power without which neither of them could exist.<sup>1</sup> This is paradoxical. That the master needs the slave makes the slave into the master and the master becomes a slave. For Hegel, this was a dialectical contradiction that drove the logical-historical movement of *Geist* to fulfillment and completion. Postmodernism, of course, does not share Hegel's optimism that contradictions will be resolved by progress or even Marx's faith in revolution. What is left is unresolved contradiction, or in other words, a paradoxical complementarity, or a never-ending struggle of opposites. This means that critique cannot escape falling into its opposite when it takes sides and tries to single out the bad guys and champion the good guys. The bad are always in some ways good and the good are always in some ways bad. Postmodernism has left critical theory with the task of showing the many complex interdependencies that constitute a society riddled by contradictions that no dialectic will resolve. It may seem that this situation means the end of critique. This is indeed true in the sense of traditional critical theory that assumed a neutral observer and the possibility of objective, value-free knowledge. Perhaps the lesson that postmodernism has

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**1** | For Foucault “[Power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions.” (Foucault 1982: 789).