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Subjectivity, Reflection and Freedom in Later Foucault

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Abstract

This paper proposes a new reading of the interaction between subjectivity, reflection and freedom within Foucault's later work. I begin by introducing three approaches to subjectivity, locating these in relation both to Foucault's texts and to the recent literature. I suggest that Foucault himself operates within what I call the "entanglement approach", and, as such, he faces a potentially serious challenge, a challenge forcefully articulated by Han. Using Kant's treatment of reflection as a point of comparison, I argue that Foucault possesses the resources to meet this challenge. The key, I contend, is to distinguish two related theses about reflection and freedom: Foucault's position is distinctive precisely because he accepts one of these theses whilst rejecting the other. I conclude by indicating how this reading might connect to the longstanding question of Foucault's own right to appeal to normative standards.

(1) Introduction

Foucault's later writing places a central emphasis on the subject. Speaking in 1982, he states that:

> [T]he goal of my work during the last twenty years…has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects.[1]

Even if one hesitates over the singular importance which Foucault here ascribes to this topic, it is clearly one of his main concerns. Thus the *History of Sexuality* intends to set out:

> The games of truth in the relation of the subject to itself and in the forming of oneself as a subject.[2]

Foucault particularly emphasises the reflexive dimension of subjectivity: for example, the differing modes in which one "constitutes oneself as the moral subject of his or her sexual conduct".[3] Indeed, subjectivity and its constitution are central to almost every aspect of his

work in this period. For example, in 1976 discussing the need to move away from an intentionalist analysis of power, he frames the issue in terms of subject constitution:

> Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate, what they seek, what is their overall strategy…rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted.[4]

More broadly, the topic of Foucault's stance on subjectivity is a vital one if we are to understand his relationship to both Kant (as Allen observes, Foucault's work is often naturally read as a genealogy of the Kantian subject), and to critical theory (consider Benhabib's warning, directed at least in part at Foucault, that theories which compromise the subject "undermine the possibility of normative criticism").[5]

This article aims to identify and analyse a number of assumptions underlying Foucault's later treatments of subjectivity. I begin by introducing three approaches to subjectivity, locating these in relation both to Foucault's texts and to the recent literature. I suggest that Foucault himself operates within what I call the "entanglement approach", and, as such, he faces a potentially serious challenge, a challenge forcefully articulated by Han. Using Kant's treatment of reflection as a point of comparison, I argue that Foucault possesses the resources to meet this challenge. The key, I contend, is to distinguish two related claims about reflection and freedom: Foucault's position is distinctive precisely because he accepts one of these claims whilst rejecting the other.

Before getting underway, let me clarify this article's scope. By "Foucault's later work" I mean the period from 1976 onwards; the main texts to which I appeal are the various articles and interviews from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Collège de France lecture courses from 1981-2 and 1982-3, and the volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. I remain neutral on the status of the subject in Foucault's earlier writings: whilst I am sympathetic to reading such as Kelly's, on which earlier texts "only bracket" the subject rather than rejecting it, I will not argue for that.[6]

(2) Three Approaches to Subjectivity

I begin by introducing three ways of thinking about subjectivity. Foucault himself deployed an evolving terminology when discussing these issues (*assujettissement*, *sujétion*,

subjectivation); due to its complexity, this is best introduced once a basic map of the terrain is in place.

The first model I will label the "transcendental approach". Exemplified by the Kantian or Husserlian visions of subjectivity, at least as those theories are usually understood, Foucault consistently rejected this view. As he puts it himself:

> If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity — which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness.[7]

Elsewhere he elaborates:

> What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject — as is done, for example, in phenomenology or existentialism…What I wanted to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another…I had to reject a priori theories of the subject in order to analyse the relationships that may exist between the constitution of the subject and games of truth, practices of power, and so on.

One can distinguish three aspects to the view which Foucault is rejecting: (i) certain features are identified as central to subjectivity, for example intentional consciousness, and these features are then studied a priori,[8] (ii) the subject is ascribed fundamental explanatory priority such that it explains or 'constitutes' without itself being explained or 'constituted', and (iii) the subject remains unchanged over time: it stands outside "historicity". These features are not equivalent: certain systems offer a priori explanations of the subject in terms of some other set of forces (one can easily imagine readings of, say, Hegel along those lines). But what is important is that Foucault rejects any "transcendental" account with even one of these three features: I take this to be shown by the remarks cited.

The second strategy I will call the "reductive approach". On this view, facts about the explanatorily fundamental aspects of subjectivity are reducible to facts of some other sort: contemporary physicalism, for example, holds that facts about consciousness are reducible to physical facts.[9] But in Foucault's case, of course, the relevant form of reduction is not a physicalist one. Rather, the concern often expressed is that he reduces subjectivity to either "power/knowledge", or to patterns of discourse or to some combination of these: the

philosophically fundamental facts about the subject would thus be a function of facts about those other phenomena. Any such reduction raises a natural worry, namely that:

> It is difficult to understand how agency could be formulated on his view. Given the enormous productive efficacy which Foucault accords to power/knowledge or the dominant discourse, there could be agency only if human beings were given the causal ability to create, effect and transform power/knowledge or discourses, but Foucault does not concede us this capacity.[10]

Alcoff's point is that any reduction of rational agency to facts about, say, existing power structures deprives individuals both of the capacity to bring about change, and of one of the properties which has been traditionally identified as a source of rights or value. Focussing on feminism, Alcoff thus concludes:

> [I]f Foucault's analysis of subjectivity is correct, a feminist emancipatory project is in trouble.[11]

The result, more broadly, would be a "one dimensional ontology…[in which] truth and subjectivity were reduced in the end to effects of power".[12]

As stated, I remain neutral on Foucault's earlier work. But what is clear is that in the period with which this article is concerned, he emphatically rejects such a reduction. Speaking in 1983, he gives the following summary of his methodology:

> [T]o the extent that this involves the analysis of relations between modes of veridiction, techniques of governmentality, and forms of practice of the self, you can see that to depict this kind of research as an attempt to reduce knowledge to power, to make it the mask of power in structures, where there is no place for a subject, is purely and simply a caricature. What is involved, rather, is the analysis of complex relations between three distinct elements none of which can be reduced to or absorbed by the others, but whose relations are constitutive of each other.[13]

In other words, his concern is precisely with the complexity of the interaction between subjectivity and other forces. As he puts it when discussing power and knowledge, if one were reducible to the other:

> I would be spared a lot of fatigue as a result. The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not identify them.[14]

In sum, neither a transcendental nor a reductive approach can make sense of the way Foucault thinks of subjectivity in the period from 1976 onwards.

This brings me to a third option, which I call the "entanglement approach". This can initially be defined negatively: the subject is amenable neither to transcendental nor reductive analysis, it is neither purely constituting nor purely constituted. Instead, it stands in a complex, shifting and mutually co-constitutive relationship to structures such as power/knowledge or discourse, a relationship which is best investigated not a priori but historically — this practice is exemplified in texts such as the 1981-2 lecture course *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. As a reading of Foucault, this approach has obvious attractions. For example, Allen's recent monograph concludes that:

> With Foucault and Butler we can understand the subject as constituted through relations of power and subjection, and also as potentially attached to and invested in these subordinating modes of identity. But this does not commit us to a denial of subjectivity, agency or autonomy. What it does commit us to is the idea that there is no outside to power, that practical reason and autonomy are inescapably shaped by our social situatedness, thus potentially by power relations.[15]

Similarly, McWhorter:

> In no sense, then, does Foucault's analysis preclude or destroy agency…I can exercise agency despite and (even because of) the fact that my very existence as a subject is a form of subjection.[16]

This approach fits many aspects of Foucault's later work. One obvious example is his emphasis on ethical practices as a "forming of oneself as a subject".[17] Another is the fact that he regards individuals as not simply dominated by existing patterns of power/knowledge and discourse, but as potentially able to exploit those patterns in creative and subversive ways. He is at pains to show, for example, how the nineteenth century discourse on homosexuality simultaneously provided the basis for a new set of repressive social mechanisms and the conceptual and rhetorical apparatus to fight against such.[18] As Deleuze observes it, the Foucauldian subject thus appears capable of turning back on the structures which constituted it and of reacting critically to them — and this fits precisely with the entanglement approach.[19]

So far I have supressed the complexities of Foucault's own terminology, but one can see that it also speaks in favour of the entanglement model. Take "*assujettissement*": in the *Will to Knowledge*, this is glossed as referring to the "constitution as 'subjects' in both senses

of the word".[20] I agree with Milchman and Rosenberg that the two dimensions in play here are activity and passivity:

> Foucault sees *assujettissement* as entailing more than relations of domination, as involving the autonomy, and the possibility of resistance, of the one who is *assujetti* [subjected] as well. While that range of meanings may be clear to Francophone readers, it is severely restricted when *assujettissement* is translated as subjection or subjugation.[21]

Exegetically, I agree completely with Milchman and Rosenberg here. I will, however, continue to use "subjection" for *assujettissement,* partly to retain continuity with Hurley's widely used translations. It is crucial, though, to recognise that such subjection incorporates an active dimension, in which the subject reacts to, and at least potentially against, the prevailing discourse or power/knowledge structures. As Kelly observes, it is precisely to highlight this active dimension that Foucault introduces "*subjectivation*" in the early 1980s:

> Subjectivation, in contrast to subjection, only refers to our constitution as subjects in one sense, namely the active one, even if this constitution is not possible in practice without also being constituted as a passive subject.[22]

There are certainly further complexities regarding Foucault's terminology which I have not addressed: for example, whether *assujettissement* in texts such as *Discipline and Punish* is intended to carry the active/passive duality which it does in later work. Foucault himself also muddies the waters by occasionally using *assujettissement* in a much narrower fashion.[23] But, despite these complexities, the basic point remains clear: Foucault's technical vocabulary, particularly the relation between subjection [*assujettissement*], and subjectivation (I will use the same term in English here as in the French), supports the entanglement approach.

In summary, there are good preliminary grounds for aligning Foucault's later work with the "entanglement approach": subjectivity is neither something like Kant's uncaused cause nor entirely reducible. The task now is to see how he develops this basic idea, and to introduce a serious problem which he might be thought to face in doing so.

(3) Developing the Foucauldian Programme: First and Second Order Questions

So far the "entanglement approach" is at best a promissory note: we need to understand better how exactly the subject interacts with the various factors characteristic of Foucauldian analysis. The issue is often expressed in terms of "resistance", for example by Allen:

> If modern power functions through the very shaping of individuality, then how is resistance to such power possible at all, given that this resistance will of necessity be carried out by individuals who have been constituted by power?[24]

Before proceeding, though, it will be useful to distinguish two related ways in which one might respond to this type of worry, and so make good on the entanglement model.

On the one hand, there is a first order programme: one seeks to provide a concrete account of some particular mode of subjection or subjectivation, either to expose its connections to certain modes of power, or to offer an alternative to the existing ways in which we live. Thus Foucault speaks of the need "to promote new forms of subjectivity".[25] He himself highlighted "S&M" in this context, and recent commentators have adduced practices from gardening to yoga.[26]

On the other hand, there is a second order programme. Here the fundamental question is: how should we think of human subjectivity, in whatever particular form it takes, if the entanglement thesis is true? It is vital to see that simply raising this question is not tantamount to sliding back into the transcendental model: one might provide a second order account of subjectivity in general — where "in general" means "as opposed to an account of some particular form of subjectivity or group of such" — which was nevertheless based on empirical evidence, and which regarded the features of subjectivity identified as both subject to change and as partly constituted by external factors. After all, Foucault uses the same apparatus — subjection, subjectivation, ethics, normativity, games, thought — when describing first order practices across very different periods: it seems legitimate to ask whether he is importing certain assumptions by re-utilising those terms. Of course, it might turn out that this terminological continuity is merely a surface phenomenon. But the question remains a reasonable one, and unless it is addressed the suspicion will be that Foucault simply "presupposes a definition of the subject that is never explicitly formulated" and so never fully analysed: there would be a fundamental "blindspot" in his work.[27]

I will argue that we can indeed identify this type of second order analysis in Foucault's later work: i.e. I believe that his texts contain and assume at least provisional answers to the question of how we should think about subjectivity in general. To bring these issues into focus, I want to introduce two aspects of subjectivity with a crucial and yet contested status in Foucault's thought: freedom and critical reflection. By looking at these,

we can see both how the entanglement thesis might be cashed within the type of second order programme described, and some of the problems it faces.

(4) Freedom and Critical Reflection: Han's Challenge

As noted when first motivating the entanglement thesis, one attraction is that it offers the potential for an account of critical reflection, in a way which the reductive view does not. By "reflection" I mean a deliberative process regarded as having at least a prima facie epistemic and practical authority. By "critical reflection" I mean a mode of reflection capable of calling into question existing standards and structures. Now, it is important that the subject as Foucault conceives it be capable of critical reflection: if nothing else, it is hard to see how one might make internal sense of Foucault's own work otherwise. However, as Oksala observes, it is unclear how this is meant to function.

> This understanding of the subject as being, on the one hand, constituted by the power/knowledge network, while on the other hand retaining a relative independence from it, is, in my view, one of the most problematic aspects of Foucault's late thinking on ethics.[28]

The issue can equally be expressed in terms of freedom. As Foucault writes:

> Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.[29]

The thinking agent is thus defined by her ability to put into question what was previously a given. Foucault himself aligns this questioning dimension of the reflective process with the act of "problematisation".[30] Critical reflection is thus a necessary condition on such problematisation, and on activities such as genealogy.[31] But how should we understand the basic capacity which Foucault is assuming here? Given that the question here is *precisely* the level of interdependence and independence between the agent and the existing structures of power/knowledge or discourse, this serves as a key test for the philosophical and exegetically viability of the entanglement approach.

Let me begin from a pessimistic perspective. Consider Béatrice Han's influential treatment of these issues:

> Foucault's new insistence on the idea of reflective problematisation and an active constitution of the self by the self, therefore, introduces into his work a very strong tension between two interpretations of subjectivation that are inherently conflictual. On the one hand, the subject appears as autonomous, as the source of problematisations of what he is and as a free actor in the practices through which he transforms himself. On the other, he is shown by genealogical analyses to be inserted into a set of relations of power and practices that are subjecting to various degrees, and that define the very conditions of possibility for the constitution of the self. Foucault's analysis of the subject is affected by this fundamental ambivalence insofar as it is very difficult to say if, for him, the subject is constituting or constituted.[32]

She elaborates using the example of ethical practices in which the subject forms her own sexuality:

> [Foucault's] insistence on the importance of problematisation and recognition as voluntary and reflective activities leads him to envisage the relationship to the body in a purely unilateral manner, as an action of the self on the self, where the body appears only as material for transformation while consciousness seems to be paradoxically reinstalled in the sovereign position that genealogy had criticised.[33]

Han's claim is that Foucault's appeal to reflective consciousness constitutes a slide back to the "sovereign" model of the subject found in transcendental theorists such as Kant or Sartre.[34] After all, there seem to be striking similarities between Foucault's vision of "thought" as 'stepping back and questioning' and the Kantian picture. Consider this from a leading contemporary Kantian, Korsgaard:

> [O]ur capacity to turn our attention onto our own mental activities is also a capacity to distance ourselves from them and to call them into question. I perceive, and I find myself with a powerful impulse to believe. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I believe?[35]

By extension, Han sees a fundamental instability in entanglement approach. Rather than a philosophy on which the subject is coherently both constituted and constituting, the "Foucauldian analysis of subjectivity appears to oscillate in a contradictory manner" between a "pseudo-transcendental" view exemplified by the treatment of reflection, and a crypto-reductive position on which practices external to the subject "constitute him in a passive and

unreflective way".[36] Han's verdict on the key case of critical reflection is clear: Foucault's position here, and by extension the whole entanglement approach, is unstable.

I hope to show in the remainder of this article why that verdict is incorrect: as I see it, Foucault has a coherent account of critical reflection, and one which bolsters the entanglement approach it exemplifies. In order to explain Foucault's stance on these charges, it will help to consider one of the contrasts which Han herself uses, namely Kant. Kant appears in several guises in Foucault's work: for example, as transcendental philosopher in the *Order of Things*, and as theorist of the present in 1984's *What is Enlightenment*. But my interest is not primarily in Foucault's own comments on Kant, but in his underlying assumptions about subjectivity and agency, and in the way in which the contrast with Kant might make those clearer. Suppose a human agent is reflecting on how to act in some given situation. One central feature of the Kantian model is that, as rational beings, such an agent is capable of:

> [D]etermining oneself from oneself, independently of necessitation by sensible impulses.[37]

For Kant it is these sensible impulses which threaten agency and critical reflection insofar as a being whose behaviour was determined by them would be at the mercy of the antecedent causal chains from which the impulses stemmed: they would have at most the "freedom of a turnspit".[38] By extension, the freedom which Kant champions is understood as an "independence from being determined by sensible impulses".[39] It is important, however, to distinguish two aspects of such independence. On the one hand, there is an independence with respect to actions taken as a result of reflection: for Kant, the facts about sensuous impulses are never sufficient to entail which act an agent will decide to perform. On the other hand, there is an independence with respect to reflection itself: the structure of reflection, of the decision making process, of what it is to reflect, is not altered by sensuous impulses.[40] In Kantian terminology, reason is pure: the "will…is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)".[41] This allows reflection to operate "unilaterally" as Han puts it: it assesses and makes a judgment on the relevant facts, without being determined by them. Of course, in a Foucauldian context, the issue is not sensuous impulses, but structures such as power/knowledge and discourse. Nevertheless, it seems we might usefully draw an analogous distinction when considering Han's charges.

(I) The human subject is free in that the facts regarding power/knowledge, discourse, other agents etc., are never sufficient to determine what act that subject will perform (for example, although not exclusively, what act the subject will perform after having reflected).

(II) The human subject is free in that the facts regarding power/knowledge, discourse, other agents etc., are never sufficient to determine what reflection is.

I am now going to argue that one of the characteristic features of Foucault's later work is that *he accepts (I) but he denies (II)*. In explaining Foucault's position, I will show both how he can meet Han's challenge, and, by extension, how the entanglement approach can be fleshed out.

(5) Foucault's Endorsement of (I)

In this section I argue that, at least in the period I am concerned with, Foucault endorses (I).

One common criticism of Foucault is that he uses "power" too broadly. There is undoubtedly some legitimacy to this critique, but I want to highlight one of the few explicit conditions which he does impose on the concept:

> [P]ower relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free. If one of them were at another's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides… 'The other' (the one on whom power is exercised) [is] thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, and possible inventions may open up.[42]

This interdependence of power and freedom meshes perfectly with Foucault's vision of the latter. Freedom for Foucault refers to the fact that human subjects face, in a way that a stone or a dog does not, an array of possibilities in terms of which they may make sense of themselves. Thus he glosses "free subjects" as:

> [I]ndividual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains.[43]

We thus have two related conditions on Foucauldian power. First, it only affects free subjects, i.e. those whose behaviour is not fully determined by it. Second, it does so by reconfiguring the possibility space, i.e. the necessarily undetermined field of choice in which such agents operate.[44] These assumptions in turn feedback into his view of power as an action upon a "field of possible actions":

> Let us come back to the definition of the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions. What would be proper to a relationship of power, then, is that it be a mode of action on actions.[45]

Similarly, this ties to his ideas of "conduct" and "governance": these capture precisely the distinctive way in which agents relate to each other given the posited interrelation between power and freedom.

> To 'conduct' is at the same time to 'lead' others (according to mechanisms of coercion that are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities. The exercise of power is a 'conduct of conducts' and a management of possibilities. Basically, power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or their mutual engagement than a question of 'government'.[46]

Since power is necessarily a relation between free agents, to exercise such power is not to necessitate, but rather to manage the possibilities the other faces and the way they understand those possibilities. Thus studying power means:

> [S]tudying the techniques and procedures by which one sets about conducting the conduct of others.[47]

In short, conduct is a relation that can only exist insofar as the agents in question are free, i.e. where the "determining factors" are not "saturating" their interaction.[48] As he puts it:

> Those who try to control, determine, and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals…the basis for all this is freedom, the relationship of the self to itself and the relationship to the other.[49]

One can see now what Foucault means when he states that "[p]ower is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free".[50] It is important to note that he is using

"power" broadly here: power cannot be exercised on free subjects if no such subjects exist because they are fully determined by, say, discourse. Foucault's conclusion must therefore be that the behaviour of such subjects does not supervene on any set of facts about power/knowledge or discourse: i.e. *it is necessarily possible for that set of facts to be held constant and yet for the behaviour of such subjects to differ*. It is this which he highlights by defining subjects in terms of "fields of possibilities": their behaviour can only be conducted or governed or influenced, never necessitated.[51]

It is vital to stress that such freedom does not only apply to an agent's interactions with others: it also underpins the possibility for agents to develop and transform their self-relations. Indeed, I agree with Huffer that "we might go so far as to call transformation the basic ethical principle in Foucault".[52] Freedom guarantees the scope for transformation by implying that the agent is never fully determined by existing facts about power/knowledge or discourse relations. In this sense, freedom makes possible the reflective space in which ethics, in the Foucauldian sense of the term, operates.

> Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection.[53]

In sum, Foucauldian freedom is a property of agents such that the relation between the behaviour of agents, on the one hand, and power or other structures on the other, cannot be one of entailment. But to say that such facts necessarily cannot determine agency in this fashion is just to endorse (I) — thus Foucault endorses (I).

This conclusion is, incidentally, perfectly compatible with the fact that Foucault also uses "freedom" in other senses: for example, to identify an ongoing regulative goal.[54] This usage is rightly emphasised by Rajchman; however, he oversimplifies matters when he says that Foucauldian freedom "not a *state*".[55] The sense of freedom I have highlighted is precisely a general assumption that Foucault makes about *what it is to be* a subject, about what that term means when he deploys it with respect to Greek cynics or twentieth century homosexuals.[56]

(6) Foucault's Rejection of (II)

I will now explain why Foucault rejects (II). Specifically, he holds that changing facts about power/knowledge or patterns of discourse alter the very nature of what it is to reflect, i.e. of those at least prima facie epistemically authoritative processes which agents deploy when

they "step back from this way of acting or reacting" and reflect on it as a problem.[57] When combined with his endorsement of (I), the result is a novel and distinctively Foucauldian picture of the scope and limitations on agency and critique. On the one hand, a subject's behaviour, for example whether she reflects or what she decides to do after reflecting, is never entailed by power or other structures. Foucault's subjects thus possess an irreducible freedom as discussed in section 5. On the other hand, the mechanisms and standards which define reflection, one of the key activities through which such free choice is exercised, are radically variable.

I argued above that freedom is an underlying assumption made by Foucault about human agency: it is this communality that allows him to speak of subjectivity as going through successive historical changes, rather than simply disappearing. However, it is equally vital for him that the "form" which such subjectivity takes alters radically:

> [The subject] is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not primarily or always identical to itself.[58]

One of Foucault's aims is to map in fine grain the nature of these changes. So, for example, how has the practice of self-knowledge, already a very specific mode of self-relation, developed over a given period? More broadly:

> How was the subject established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts, as a possible, desirable, or even indispensable object of knowledge? How were the experiences that one may have of oneself and the knowledge that one forms of oneself organized according to certain schemes? How were these schemes defined, valorized, recommended, imposed?[59]

His conclusions are that such changes are radical, diverse and inter-related in complex ways: I will now show how they alter the nature of reflection and thus lead him to reject (II).

I introduced (II) with reference to Kant, who defends an a priori and transcendental account of our reflective capacity, and who can serve again as a useful counterpoint.[60] On the Kantian model, an agent reflecting on what to do is faced with multiple "sensuous impulses", impulses which stand in causal relations with each other and with the external world. Whilst the behaviour of a non-rational animal is simply a function of the strongest such causal pull, the case of a rational agent is supposedly quite different. On the Kantian story, for a rational agent to act it must decide to treat one of those impulses *as a reason*: to use one of Kant's examples, two agents might both be in extreme pain, but it is open to each to decide whether

this "sensuous impulse" constitutes a reason to end his life. It is this assumption, that for a rational agent an impulse "can move us to act only if we let it", which Allison famously refers to as the "incorporation principle".[61] It is in virtue of this that rational agents are morally responsible; their behaviour is not simply the downstream consequence of causal forces, but based on normatively assessable decisions. Finally, a token decision is morally permissible only if the maxim or principle in virtue of which it is treated as a reason can pass a certain test, namely whether "I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law'.[62]

As I see it, Foucault shows, contra Kant, how the very nature of the reflective process alters as facts about power/knowledge or prevailing discourse patterns shift. The Kantian model obviously includes many elements which Foucault sees as contingent in this manner: for example, the appeal to the juridical apparatus of laws.[63] But I will present the argument here by looking at the case of "sensuous impulses". Again, let us suppose a human agent, faced with various such impulses, is reflecting on what she should do in some given situation: two points can then be made from Foucault's perspective.

First, the relation which the reflective agent has to these impulses is subject to radical transformation. Consider the example Foucault gives of the shifts between Stoicism and Christianity. In the Christian case, the key task is to focus on the impulses themselves as representations or ideas in order to identify their origin:

> [T]he question raised is that of its origin. Does the idea I have in my mind come from God? — in which case it is necessarily pure. Does it come from Satan? — in which case it is impure. Or possibly even: does it come from myself, in which case, to what extent can we say it is pure or impure?[64]

Reflection thus takes the form of a practice of decipherment focussed on the representations themselves. The goal is not to better know the objects represented by these states; rather it is concerned with the mental states per se and with their potentially concealed source. At ground level this is manifest as:

> [A] requirement of vigilance expressed in precepts and advice like: Pay attention to all the images and representations which enter your mind; always examine every movement in your heart so as to decipher in them the signs or traces of a temptation; try to determine whether what comes to your mind has been sent by God or the devil,

> or even by yourself, is there not a trace of concupiscence in what seem to be the purest ideas that enter your mind?[65]

The relation posited between the reflective agent and her desires here is completely different from the Kantian one. It is irrelevant for Kant where any particular sensuous impulse comes from: even if they were divine in origin, it is one of the basic principles of the Kantian idea of autonomy that such a fact would be irrelevant to their normative status.[66] But it is also fundamentally different from yet other ways in which reflection has been modelled — for example, the Stoic vision. As Foucault observes, in the Stoic case there is likewise an injunction to "look inwards", to cultivate a certain reflective relation to one's impulses. But the nature of this relation is very different:

> I would like to stress the nevertheless profound difference between the Stoic exercise of the examination of representations…and what is found later among Christians, in apparently the same form of an examination of representations.[67]

The task in the Stoic system is no longer to track the origin of those impulses, nor is the procedure concerned primarily with the "representation in its psychical reality"; nor, of course, is the point, as in Kant, to subsume those impulses within maxims or principles ('If I am hungry, I should eat') and then subject them to the universal law test.[68] Rather, the reflective practice takes as its focus the external world objects represented *by* these ideas: it then applies specific procedures of decomposition to the representation in order to learn more about the object, and so to provide the agent with a better orientation for action. Thus Foucault discussing Marcus Aurelius' injunction to:

> [D]efine and describe the object whose image appears in the mind "in such a way that you see it distinctly, as it is in essence, naked, whole, and in all its aspects; and say to yourself its name and the names of the parts of which it is composed and into which it will be resolved…." The object whose image appears to the mind, everything that comes under the mind must be put under surveillance, as it were, and must be the pretext, the occasion, the object for a work of definition and description.[69]

One can see the clear contrast with thinkers such Cassian:

> The problem for Christians is not at all one of studying the objective content of the representation…Knowing the nature of the object represented is not a problem for Cassian. His problem is that of knowing the degree of purity of the representation itself as idea, as image.[70]

Within the Stoic model of reflection the relation between subject and desire is thus neither conceived in Kantian juridical terms, nor is it one of decipherment with respect to origins or purity. Rather, the aim is to exploit the flexibility afforded by representation in order to break down the object, and to play out various scenarios regarding its parts and utility, "as if to focus the gaze of a nearsighted person onto the finest grain of things".[71] The result is epistemically and practically authoritative action. Thus Foucault on the results of the decompositional exercises in Book VI:

> What is it we do by applying this method, by recalling that copulation is a friction of nerves with spasms and excretions, and that the robe is sheep's wool tinted with the bloody purple of a shellfish? We get to grips with the things themselves …in this way we will be able to free ourselves from the bombast (*tuphos*), from the bewitchment with which they are in danger of capturing and captivating us.[72]

In short, we have fundamentally different pictures of reflection, pictures tied to changes in power/knowledge or discourse formations: for example, the rise of confessional practices in the Christian case.

Second, the standards, methods and procedures by which genuinely authoritative, as opposed to misguided or misfiring, instances of reflective activity are recognised are also radically variable. In the Kantian case, such authority is again a matter of correspondence to a set of a priori principles within which universalizability plays a core role. Foucault's concern, in contrast, is again to map the huge variability visible as these notions are reconceptualised across distinct periods. Consider his treatment of the role of particular props, such as the "*hupomnemata*" or "notebooks" within the first two centuries of imperial Rome:

> However personal they may be, these *hupomnemata*…do not constitute a 'narrative of oneself'; they do not have the aim of bringing to the light of day the *arcana conscientiae*, the oral or written confession of which has a purificatory value. The movement they seek to bring about is the reverse of that: the intent is not to pursue the unspeakable, nor to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self.[73]

The point here is that, for these subjects, the possibility of reflective success is closely tied to the deployment of a very particular device, namely a written record with a specific and anti-narrativistic form, one in which the accounting of tasks done, food eaten, time slept and time

worked can all be scrutinised.[74] Part of Foucault's concern is to show how this device interacts with another ideal of reflective success, one in which it is contingent upon a privileged mode of dialogue, a dialogue whose form is itself subject to radically varied configuration: as Foucault stresses, there is clearly a significant difference between a system such as Seneca's where the person who guides our reflection should be a close friend, and a system such as Galen's where they should be unknown to you.[75] So, for example, the particular stylistics of the notebook-format lays the ground for the Senecan device of publicising one's daily accounting through correspondence.

> To write is thus to "show oneself", to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence….It is noteworthy that Seneca, commencing a letter in which he must lay out his daily life to Lucilius, recalls the moral maxim that "we should live as if we lived in plain sight of all men"…In the case of the epistolary account of oneself, it is a matter of bringing into congruence the gaze of the other and that gaze which one aims at oneself when one measures one's everyday actions according to the rules of a technique of living.[76]

Foucault's aim, in short, is to identify the changing configurations which define reflective success in distinct periods, a change exemplified by the fine grained, highly transitory role assigned to practices such as the notebook or Senecan dialogue. These changes are, unsurprisingly, more radical over greater time periods. So, for example, he presents the Cartesian conception of knowledge as distinctive precisely in that it denied that epistemic authority rested upon the speaker having undergone ascetic practices of any kind.[77]

Foucault's full picture includes other dimensions on which I have not touched here: several are schematised in his definition of "ethics".[78] Indeed, there are many aspects of Foucault's work which could usefully be discussed in the context of rejecting (II): the constitution of parrhesiast, for example, or the way in which the "highly recognizable forms of behaviour" of the Cynic sage were integrally related to the role which Cynicism identified for reflective activity.[79] However, whilst my analysis is obviously not exhaustive, I believe I have done enough to show that Foucault rejects (II). What counts as reflection and reflective success may indeed be determined by facts about the prevailing structures of power/knowledge and discourse. Practices, such as the highly stylised written props discussed, are, in the relevant periods, defining criteria for what it is to reflect: in this sense, the physical text "becomes a principle of rational action in the writer himself".[80]

(7) Reflection, Freedom and Normativity

Let me now summarise the argument made. I think Allen is right when she states that:

> Foucault understands autonomy — both in the sense of the capacity for critical reflection and in the sense of the capacity for deliberate self-transformation, both of which are implicit in his technologies of the self — as always bound up with power.[81]

The challenge, as I see it, is to cash the phrase "always bound up with". I have argued that the solution is to distinguish two claims. On the one hand, in virtue of the acceptance of (I), Foucauldian agents possess an irreducible freedom — their behaviour, including their acts of reflection, is never entailed by the existing set of facts about power/knowledge, discourse, the behaviour of other agents etc. On the other hand, in virtue of the rejection of (II), what it is to reflect, i.e. what it is that agents do when they take up this stance, may be entailed by such facts in various complex ways. The presence of (I), however, necessarily ensures that these assumptions about the nature of reflection are themselves always open to challenge: it necessarily possible, whatever the prevailing power distribution, that we may critically reflect on our practices of reflection and come to replace them with others. *Perhaps the best way to put it is this: Foucauldian freedom guarantees, in its acceptance of (I), that there is a space in which critical reflection and transformative self-determination can operate. But this is all it guarantees.* It does not establish that such reflection will proceed in any given direction, nor that things will improve in any sense. Furthermore, what triggers critical reflection in any specific period will be an empirical question to be answered on a case by case basis — for example, by looking at how and why Stoic approaches diverged from those previously dominant. Taken together, these results model the interaction between the subject and structures such as power and discourse: they thus flesh out "entanglement approach" defended in the first half of this article.

Let us return now directly to Han's challenge to the entanglement model. For her Foucault "oscillate[s] in a contradictory manner" between "two irreconcilable extremes": a "pseudo-transcendental" moment exemplified in his appeals to reflection, and a crypto-reductive position on which practices external to the subject "constitute him in a passive and unreflective way".[82] One can now see that her picture is too crude. On the one hand, Foucault's commitment to (I) does not function as a transcendental foundation or a priori guide: all it guarantees is the possibility of first order, empirical criticism. In this Foucault

differs radically from what he derides as "the simple relativisation of the phenomenological subject", on which there remains an explanatorily substantive a priori or transcendental theory of selfhood, for example the analysis of Dasein, which is then instantiated in a variety of different contexts.[83] Likewise, the denial of (II) ensures that any appeal to a pure or transcendental notion of rationality is superseded by a fine grained picture of reflective authority as constantly changing and contested. On the other hand, however, none of this implies that the subject must be either passive or unreflective. On the contrary, she may seek to understand the genealogy of discourse and power in order precisely to "promote new forms of subjectivity or to "refuse this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries".[84] Such activity is necessarily impure in that it initially operates out of and in the context of a set of rational standards which it may ultimately seek to contest: it is necessarily a piecemeal, non-linear process. By extension, Han's reading of the reflective subject as "sovereign" and capable of acting "unilaterally" is off: the very nature of reflection, of what such a subject does, is something over which it can only gradually seek understanding and perhaps a measure of control and transformation. As Foucault put it, the subject is not a transcendental subject nor a fixed substance nor a passively malleable muteness, but a "form": the combination of the acceptance of (I) and the denial of (II) define the contours within which this reflexive "form" operates.[85]

At this juncture one can imagine the following objection, coming not from the pessimistic position of Han, but the more optimistic one of Kant: 'what you have shown is that beliefs about reflection vary — but this leaves it open that there might still be some a priori truth as to which procedures genuinely and universally confer epistemic or practical authority on a decision'. I think there are two points which can usefully be made in response. First, it is correct that Foucault's primary interest is in questions such as 'which technologies of the self have *in fact* been dominant'. For example, when *Discipline and Punish* described the confession as essential to "the ritual of producing penal truth", he does not mean, absurdly, that it could never lead to the conviction of the innocent.[86] Rather, his point was that such procedures were taken as sufficient, and often as necessary, for validating both the timeline of some particular crime and the broader narrative of society's response to it. In explaining his reasons for rejecting (II), I have tried to show how he offers a similar analysis of the various forms of reflective practice: each represents a distinctive 'politics of truth', a particular way of conferring epistemic or practical authority. Second, we ought to concede

that Foucault does not disprove the possibility that there might be some a priori ascertainable fact about how reflection ought to function. But this is partly because it is unclear how one would go about disproving that; at most one might identify errors in particular transcendental projects while also introducing some broader considerations, be they Foucauldian genealogies or naturalistic empiricism, which suggest that such projects are unlikely to succeed. I think this is precisely what he does do: he illustrates the explanatory powers of a genealogical approach to subjectivity, as illustrated by the denial of (II), and he offers it as a live alternative to the transcendental view.

This brings me to a final issue: the longstanding debate over which standard Foucault might use to distinguish unacceptable exercises of power from legitimate ones. As has often been observed, the question is fundamentally bound up with the modern question of "situated rationality", i.e. whether Foucault or Habermas or others can balance demands for a theory of rationality with a recognition of the historical and social context in which any decision takes place. Although, it is beyond this paper to address these issues directly, the reading defended here would link well with Koopman's 'pragmatised' Foucault. On Koopman's account, the idea of a universal norm is replaced with a Deweyean process of potential universalisation, one in which we progressively apply something, be it an ethical standard or a scientific unit of measurement, to an increasing range of first order cases and continue to do so insofar as that proves fruitful — by our own ever changing lights. Thus:

> Claims for universalisability must be experimentally tested in actual practical processes rather than asserted by fiat as properties inherent in the nature of things…Reconceiving universality as a process helps us stay humble so that we do not get so excited that we start beating one another over the head with our supposedly already-universal ideas.[87]

The normative task is thus, operating from within our existing practices, to seek as best we can to identify blindspots, restrictions and errors present both in the standards and procedures we are using and in their application, and to develop, sustain and transform the corresponding discourses and institutions. Foucault's acceptance of (I) and his rejection of (II) serve to simultaneously capture the complexity, and yet also to guarantee the possibility, of that critical exercise.[88]

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Notes

[1] Foucault 1982:777.

[2] Foucault 1990:6.

[3] Foucault 2011b:5.

[4] Foucault 1980:97.

[5] Allen 2003:191; Benhabib 1992:213.

[6] Kelly 2009:82.

[7] Foucault 1970: xiv.

[8] I refer to "central features" since Foucault need not, and does not, establish that any a priori investigation of the subject is illegitimate: trying to analyse intentional content via an a priori theory of indexicals is for him marginal, rather than necessarily erroneous.

[9] There are different views on what exactly "reduction" amounts to and how it relates to notions like supervenience: it makes no difference here which specification is chosen.

[10] Alcoff 1990:75.

[11] Alcoff 1990:73.

[12] McCarthy 1991: 63.

[13] Foucault 2011a:8-9.

[14] Foucault 2000:433.

[15] Allen 2008:177.

[16] McWhorter 1999:79.

[17] Foucault 1990:6.

[18] Foucault 1978: 101.

[19] Deleuze 1988:101.

[20] Foucault 1978:60.

[21] Milchman and Rosenberg 2007:55.

[22] Kelly 2009:88.

[23] Foucault 1996:386.

[24] Allen 2008:59.

[25] Foucault 1982:785.

[26] Foucault 1983:20; McWhorter 1999:162,168; Heyes 2007:140-9.

[27] Han 2002:167;186.

[28] Oksala 2005:165. Oksala herself, partly motivated by the anti-humanist considerations of early Foucault, develops a notion of freedom which would not be predicated of subjects, but rather refers to facts such as that "language can never be fully mastered or tamed, but results in unexpected orders and unimaginable conjunctions of meanings" (Oksala 2005:189). I don't deny the importance of this project. But I think it is clear from the discussion that follows that Foucault himself sees freedom as an attribute (albeit a deeply problematic one) of the human subject.

[29] Foucault 1997c:117.

[30] Foucault 1997c:118.

[31] On the relationship between genealogy and problematisation see Koopman 2013:93.

[32] Han 2002:172.

[33] Han 2002:165.

[34] Han 2002:172, 169.

[35] Korsgaard 1996:93.

[36] Han 2002:172;187;185.

[37] Kant 1998a: A534/B 562. For Kant's work, I use the standard *Akademie* pagination with the exception of the first *Critique* where I use the standard A/B pagination.

[38] Kant 1997:97.

[39] Kant 1996:213-4.

[40] Kant 1998b:440.

[41] Kant 1998b:440.

[42] Foucault 1982:789.

[43] Foucault 1982:790.

[44] I am following Foucault's strict definition of power here which limits the term's application to acts, rather than dispositions or capacities: Foucault 1982:788.

[45] Foucault 1982:791.

[46] Foucault 1982:789.One important issue in Foucault's later work is the continuities between this general idea of governance and the particular forms of governmentality characteristic of modern administrative arrangements.

[47] Foucault 2011b:4.

[48] Foucault 1982:790.

[49] Foucault 1997a:300.

[50] Foucault 1982:790.

[51] Theoretically, it would be possible to hold that such agents were free with respect to all the familiar components of Foucauldian analysis, and yet necessarily determined by natural laws in classic deterministic fashion. This presents no real problems for my analysis: my concern is to show how Foucauldian agents can react critically and independently to existing socio-political and other arrangements, and such independence could co-exist or not with determination by the laws of physics. However, since Foucault himself clearly has little interest in classical debates over causal determinism, I will not pursue the issue.

[52] Huffer 2010:243.

[53] Foucault 1997a:284.

[54] For example, Foucault 1984:46-7.

[55] Rajchman 1991:111.

[56] This state/achievement ambiguity is present in many thinkers: consider the senses in which Kantian rational agents who act morally and those who act immorally might be said to be autonomous.

[57] Foucault 1997c:117.

[58] Foucault 1997a:290.

[59] Foucault 1997e:87.

[60] The remarks that follow are intended only to introduce one very widespread reading of Kant as a point of comparison: I remain neutral on whether what follows captures the opinions of the historical Kant.

[61] The cited remark is from Baron 1995:189; on the "incorporation principle" see Allison 1990:51.

[62] Kant 1998b:402.

[63] Foucault 1978:60.

[64] Foucault 2005:300.

[65] Foucault 2005:218.

[66] If anything, Kant is concerned that such knowledge would undermine rather than further reflection since, given our frailties, it is likely our decisions would become dictated by fear of divine punishment (Kant 1997:147).

[67] Foucault 2005:299.

[68] The cited phrase is from Foucault 2005:300.

[69] Foucault 2005:290-1;293.

[70] Foucault 2005:300.

[71] Foucault 2005:290.

[72] Foucault 2005:305.

[73] Foucault 1997d:210.

[74] Foucault 1997d:220.

[75] Foucault 2005:399.

[76] Foucault 1997d:216.

[77] Foucault 1997b:279.

[78] Foucault 1990:26-7.

[79] Foucault 2011a:169-70; see also 180.

[80] Foucault 1997d:213.

[81] Allen 2008:173.

[82] Han 2002:172;187;185.

[83] As Heidegger himself insists, "transcendental philosophy denotes nothing but ontology" (Heidegger 1982: 180; I use the standard *Gesamtausgabe* pagination).

[84] Foucault 1982:785.

[85] Foucault 1997a:290.

[86] Foucault 1995:25;55.

[87] Koopman 2013: 262,258.

[88] [Acknowledgements]