

Foucault's Dream: The Irony of Genealogy and Subjectivity

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The strength of the devil and his power over us lie in his irony.¹

The work of Michel Foucault is that of an ironist; of this, one can be assured. However, ironists, or more appropriately, irony, has bent and twisted itself linguistically as a philosophical device over time. From Socratic irony to the irony of Kierkegaard and his multiple pseudonyms, irony offers, if nothing else, a paradox, a presentation of opposites that are not quite opposite, one eventually leading into the other. My purpose here is to reveal Foucault's work as representational of a certain form of irony, not only being posited within the content of his work, but also representing a unique political and philosophical stance that is both critique and positive theory in its very irony.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty defines the ironist as, "the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires-- someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. . ."2 Within this category Rorty places Foucault, stating that Foucault is "an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal."³ Surrounding and defining the philosophical irony to which Rorty is referring are Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. An immense and varying trinity, all find that the great themes of Western thought have exhausted themselves, functionless as actualities.⁴ In the case of Foucault, however, Rorty believes that the liberalism of Western thought has been deemed "extinguished" along with the possibilities of epistemology. By liberal, Rorty is referring to the humanitarian society of compromise in which suffering is decreased while the chance of choosing one's own lifestyle is increased.⁵ According to Rorty, Foucault takes a "Nietzschean attitude towards the idea of epistemology" in which "there is nothing optimistic to say." Foucault's irony is a rejection in this sense, positing only critique, abandoning "the striving for objectivity and the intuition that Truth is One, not to redescribe or ground it."⁶ Theory becomes ultimately tainted within Foucault's writings for Rorty, becoming an impossible attempt to accurately represent thought.⁷ Foucault's sense of anti-theorizing is so strong that he neglects to acknowledge that social suffering has decreased while personal choice has increased since the Enlightenment.⁸ Through this analysis of Foucault's lack of positive regard for post-Enlightenment "achievement," Rorty finds Foucault to be at fault in his negative portrayal of "Western man."

Rorty's arguments against Foucault as an anti-humanist stem primarily from Habermas' statements regarding Foucault as an archconservative. The brunt of the humanist critique of Foucault is that he cannot acknowledge the "good" imposed upon the subject through liberalist intervention. Although Habermas agrees with Foucault's critique of the shift from subject to patient as the "object of medical research," he does not agree with what he sees in Foucault's work as a complete lack of "overarching meaning in this chaotic multitude of past discourse."⁹ According to Habermas, Foucault errs in his lack of theory, an irony which destroys everything in its path, only utilizing history to reveal the errors of Enlightenment thinking. Habermas still holds a firm belief that "man" exists as a universal entity, each individual bound by a connectedness which is based within the commonality of reason, whereas Foucault isolates the individual, viewing "man" as less than a full entity. Rather, "man" has become a pawn in the fields of power which subjugate the individual. While Rorty and Habermas find this to be the liberation of compromise, fostering intersubjectivity, Foucault reveals the suffering this compromise entails.

Although the argument from Habermas against Foucault is primarily political, Rorty's argument is both political and epistemological. For Rorty, humanism, and ultimately Truth, is based within an optimistic epistemology that Foucault rejects.¹⁰ This argument is for humanism, not simply against Foucault. Although Rorty makes attempts to be objective regarding Foucault's politics, his criticism is a humanistic one which ultimately forces a misreading of Foucault's oeuvre.

In order to understand Foucault's philosophical project(s), the task of unearthing his first struggles with psychoanalysis, not epistemology or ethics, is necessary. One must read before *Madness and Civilization*, paying close attention to Foucault's investigation of the subject in his commentary on Biswanger. Within the text of the young Foucault, the reader finds, perhaps for the only time, Foucault as direct theorist. Subjectivity is discussed not historically or genealogically, but rather, theoretically. Foucault posits his idea of what the subject, isolated as only the "I," is before engaging in contact with the world. For Foucault, the subject is the dream itself, and this is Ariadne's thread to be followed into Foucault's genealogical labyrinth. The dream represents the subject as freedom before its encounter with the world.¹¹

Foucault objects to Freudian analysis on this very basis: analysis "presupposes a radical objectification of the dreaming subject, which comes to play its role among other personages in a setting where it takes on a symbolic character."¹² This critique of analysis poses a problem not only to the realm of dream analysis, but to all notions of knowledge as well, for the subject becomes the foundation of knowledge itself through its existence as the dream. Only when the subject is released into the world of wakefulness does knowledge impose itself upon the subject. This relationship, between the subject as dream, "an existence carving itself out in barren space,

shattering chaotically, exploding noisily, netting itself, a scarcely breathing animal, in the webs of death,"¹³ and the subject as an object within the world becomes the problematic starting point for Foucault's work. Rather than question metaphysical possibilities that may or may not exist outside of the subject, Foucault discovers that the nature of the subject in the world is problematic, for the subject determines the world (through its nature as dream) while the objective world determines the subject (through the placement of the subject in the world). The space of the subject then becomes a "sign" of power, signifying the state of the subject tarrying between the secure domain of itself as dream and the world "filled with stifling threats and sudden dangers, . . . furrowed by irruptive forces."¹⁴ The dream becomes the seat of imagination, imposing itself as subject upon the world, while the world becomes the force of order, subjugating the "I" to a specific location within the world. The subject emerges, embodied by an image in the world external to the dream.¹⁵ It is here, in this initial contact with the external world of objectivity, that the subject becomes contingent upon that which is other than itself.

The task of rediscovering the subject's identity (definition) in the world is the basis of Foucault's work, consisting of tearing away the imposed categories and masks that have been placed upon the subject, defining the subject as a subject of the world. The method he utilizes to find the subject is one he inherits from Nietzsche, genealogical in presentation and archaeological in execution. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Foucault does not impose positive theory upon his genealogical analysis. In fact, he must refrain from commenting on the meaning of the subject within his "fictional histories," for the act of commenting not only erases what has been revealed, but places the theorist in a position of being seemingly outside of subjectivity. What is seen (by the genealogist) never resides in what is said about what is seen.¹⁶ Due to this paradoxical tension of being the writer of that which cannot be written, Foucault opts to juxtapose historical materials, allowing irony to be discovered by the reader.

In fact, excessive action in one direction usually sets up a reaction in the opposite direction.¹⁷

From *Madness & Civilization* through the *History of Sexuality*, the writer does not state the inherent conflicts between that which is expected and that which occurs within a specific domain of knowledge, but rather, the reader discovers, through the placement of historical data, that what has been intended has the opposite effect. The cause of the attempt, the origin of a specific field of knowledge itself, must attempt to remedy this undesired effect *ad infinitum*, constantly redefining itself according to that which it tries to bring under its control. The outcome of using this method of criticism is the realization that the fields of discourse with which Foucault concerns himself are, in fact, self-critical. The fields he searches through reveal their own ironies, presenting not histories of progression, but histories of both giving birth to their own

problematizations and their continual efforts to remedy those problems which arise from the effects of discourse. Foucault, upon placing his found information into a particular order (as the archaeologist does with his discovered objects of the past), unmasks that which is seemingly absolute as inherently contingent and oppressive, elusive and ever-changing, subjugating the subject as a specific type of subject while claiming to liberate the individual.

The most explicit form in which to look to find the basis of Foucault's genealogy is that of Nietzsche, in the *Genealogy of Morals*. Rather than approach morality as absolute, Nietzsche traces morality back to the class systems of *the ancien regime*. Upon the discovery of morality as signification of class, Nietzsche then maps morality's transformation into quality beyond class through a series of historical juxtaposition. What this method reveals is not the inherent nature of morality, but rather the immediate irony of morality, in essence, the fact that statements defining morality become the opposite of what they once were. From this genealogical method, Foucault derives his own strategy of trying "to describe statements, entire groups of statements, by making the relations of implication, of opposition and exclusion which could link them appear."¹⁸ The appearance of these progressive interconnections (to the reader) is what Foucault relies upon to make his critical theory known.

When Foucault first attempts the genealogical method, he does not directly confront morality itself, but rather its practice through the history of madness. Just as Nietzsche had revealed the historical objectification of the subject through the grid of morality, Foucault reveals the mold of opposition that is placed upon the subject when the "mad/sane" dynamic is posited into the world as a method to distinguish selves from one another. Through the placement of the subject into a strata of psychology, the subject is (re)defined according to genus and difference. The subject becomes a psychological object consisting of nothing more than a psyche, either healthy (fitting into society) or unhealthy (differing from society). It is within the domain of psychology that the dream, in essence, the subject, becomes interpreted from outside of itself.

The immediate irony of this emergence of the psychological subject is that psychology only comes into existence by creating for itself a problem (madness) which psychology must "cure" in order to be a discourse creating practice. As Foucault moves through the history of madness, erroneously attempting to reach its core, his placement of its history (problems and remedies) reveals that psychology, by its very praxis, must constantly redefine itself, for it continually must create new remedies for the "psychoses" which arise from its former cures. Madness is ever-elusive to psychology, for psychology creates its definitions of madness as "that which must be cured."

Psychology also proves, in opposition to the humanist claim that although it has not cured all of its patients, it has at least become a more humane science, and that it has progressively moved from physical imprisonment to moral imprisonment. Although the method by which psychology grips its patients has changed, its grip has moved into the patient itself, striving to grasp ahold of madness as it moves further into the subject.¹⁹ The irony of psychology not only lies in its inability to develop a final cure, thereby eliminating any need for psychology, but in its elusive nature as a humane science, depicting itself as consistently freeing the subject of its grasp.

The dynamic of irony that is revealed through his study of madness is also revealed in Foucault's study of medicine, wherein the subject is objectified not as a psyche, but as a body. The body as subject is specifically objectified through the clinician's gaze, a gaze that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century, allowing doctors to investigate and dictate the truth of the body which had previously been "below the threshold of the visible and the expressible."²⁰ But unlike the study of madness, medicine existed before the advent of the clinic. Foucault's major focus in his analysis of the clinic is the specific points of transition between eighteenth and nineteenth century medicine. Specifically, Foucault reveals the way discourse enveloped the subject as patient in the nineteenth century, whereas eighteenth century medicine consisted of the subject's power over itself. According to Foucault, the patient's *health* was no longer the focus of medicine after the emergence of the clinic. Rather, the patient's *normality* became the focus of medical discourse and practice in the nineteenth century.²¹

The stress on normality expressed through nineteenth century medicine is not the same as that stress placed on normality which arose with the birth of madness. Although both madness and medicine divide human subjects into two groups, medicine offers an all-encompassing field of abnormality which is not offered by a study of madness. Subjects are no longer either objectified or subjectified through normalization; they are all objectified as living subjects, in essence, medical subjects, known through the medical gaze as life projected towards death. Each subject is not diseased *a priori*, but each subject has the potentiality for disease, and each subject, through life, degenerates constantly towards death, for degeneration and life are necessarily intertwined.²²

Foucault reveals, upon his archaeological examination of the clinician's gaze, that the clinician, in order to preserve life, takes the viewpoint of death. Disease no longer remains an accident that attaches itself to life, dragging it hopelessly into the grip of death. Through the clinician's gaze, the life of the subject is the very degeneration of the subject; the subject itself becomes a diseased object constantly tarrying with death.²³ Due to this nature of the subject, the only method by which to locate and define the subject is in death, for the birth of the clinic also represents the death of

God wherein the body is no longer simply a cage for the subject's soul (the true subject), but rather the body is the subject itself, trapped within its own living disease which blinds the clinician's gaze to its own truth. The previously individual soul of the subject becomes the individual body of the subject, or more precisely, the individual illness of the subject.²⁴ The gaze of medicine places the individual subject within an envelope of finitude, for death defines the subject, and it is death which creates the subject as finite.

Medicine, viewed through the genealogical lens, becomes not a progressive science, constantly gaining knowledge of the truth of the subject. Rather, through Foucault's juxtaposition of medical history, the knowledge of medicine, or the medical episteme, reveals itself to be a construction of truth erected around the remains of the infinite subject, composing the finite subject of the nineteenth century. With the birth of the clinic,

Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science, he grasped himself within his language, and gave himself, in himself and by himself, a discursive existence, only in the opening created by his own elimination: from experience of Unreason was born psychology, the very possibility of psychology; from the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as a science of the individual.²⁵

The history of medicine erases its period of construction, its transformation from a belief in the infinite unknowable to the knowledge of the finite individual. This history is essential to the birth of medicine, but as Foucault illuminates, it is also the disease which attacks medicine itself.²⁶ Ironically medicine constructs an individual subject which it kills before construction for the purpose of prolonging the life of the subject.

Herein lies the true beginning of Foucault's ironic analyses, for the subject is no longer simply divided between mad and sane (sovereign). With the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault reveals the mass objectification of subjectivity in general: a medicalization of the subject that proposes to aid the subject only after pounding it into an "homogeneous space."²⁷ Medical discourse must exist in order to prevent entrance into death. Medicine protects the subject from its own nature as degenerative.

*It is only inasmuch as I am infinite that I am limited.*²⁸

What was once infinite and sovereign is now finite and bound to its freedom. The medical field of discourse expands beyond the scope of the psychological grid of truth, placing itself over all subjects. The dream becomes degenerative life cascading

down into itself, deeper within towards death. The subject is no longer a thing which thinks, but a body which is contagious to itself and other bodies. Each subject prolongs its finitude which provides its existence and self-knowledge.

From an analysis of medicine as an objectifying *episteme*, Foucault turns his attention to the Modern episteme which allowed the birth of the clinic to occur as a discourse on truth. The Modern episteme, according to Foucault, may be divided into three separate sciences which all surround the subject, defining the subject through their avoidance of the subject. Just as Foucault had reassembled the histories of madness and the clinic, the histories of biology, economy, and language are reconstructed, revealing an epistemic shift from the Classical to the Modern. Although Foucault places stress upon the episteme of each field, his interest is not primarily epistemology. Rather, Foucault organizes the three sciences as an interconnection between Kuhn's natural (hard) sciences and the social sciences.

Each episteme provides a bridge that ultimately effects both types of science, for each (biology, economics, philology), rather than defining the subject specifically, defines a field in which the subject exists. Each science offers evidence of the "profound upheaval" which "signaled the collapse of the Classical Age and made possible the emergence of man."²⁹ Through this reassemblage of history, the Modern era reveals its unveiling of man as a subject within the world of objects, a subject who is both subjectified and objectified through his modern episteme.³⁰

The irony revealed through the *Order of Things* is not that of immediacy, but rather that of mediation, for the three sciences unknowingly construct fields of knowledge which indirectly provide the subject with both an empirical and transcendent nature. These sciences provide the subject with a schema for the epistemological classification of objects outside of the subject. When the subject, however, turns its attention to subjectivity itself, the subject becomes an object which must be classified by the same epistemological framework. The subject's knowledge of itself is limited to its understanding of the world of objects, but it is only this limited knowledge which provides the subject with the possibility of knowing.³¹ Herein lies the paradox of the modern, Kantian subject, isolated from the objects of scientific discourse, but necessarily included as an object of knowledge.³²

The irony mediated by the three sciences takes two distinct forms. The first is an attack on metaphysics in the movement to answer the questions of metaphysics. Each of the three sciences performs this task under the veil of knowledge; each a branch of philosophy which turns against itself. Biology, the philosophy of life, "denounces metaphysics as a veil of illusion, that of labour denounces it as an alienated form of thought and an ideology, that of language as a cultural episode."³³ The three sciences each provide the subject with an understanding of objects: life, work, and language.

However, each must avoid the question of subjectivity in becoming a science. Biology only refers to the life of the body, leaving the notion of subjectivity excluded from its episteme. Economics, although involving the subject as worker or owner, only pertains to the system (body of work) in which the subject exists, thereby excluding the nature of the subject from discourse. Language, in the same fashion, only refers to the symbols surrounding the subject. Although the meaning of signifiers and the relationship between signifier and signified is defined, the subject remains external to its very language.³⁴ This avoidance of the subject leads to the second and most important form of irony Foucault reveals: the irony of the social (human) sciences.

The role of the social sciences is that of locating and describing the subject within these three fields of discourse. Every social science is an extension of biology, economics, and studies of language. "[T]he human sciences are addressed to man in so far as he lives, speaks, and produces."³⁵ Social science differs from natural (normal) science, for natural science does not confront the subject; instead it constructs paradigms for non-subjective entities (or phenomena which has previously been defined by scientific theory), only shifting paradigms when the problem of anomaly is discovered.³⁶ Social science begins with the anomaly of the subject, in essence, the analytic of finitude, creating an external, remedial paradigm by which the subject is defined. This turn towards subjectivity propels the social sciences outside of science, and is only involved in the empiricism of science to the degree of analyzing the representation of the subject.³⁷ Beyond this representation, however, the social sciences must define the subject as a *non-object*, its origins holding the secret of subjectivity while always remaining beyond the grasp of knowledge.

Whatever it touches it immediately causes to move: it cannot discover the unthought, or at least move towards it, without immediately bringing the unthought nearer to itself. or even, perhaps, without pushing it further away, and in any case without causing man. s own being to undergo a change by that very fact, since it is deployed in the distance between them.³⁸

As Foucault revealed through the history of madness, the subject must be placed within a paradigm external to the subject itself which defines the subject as an object of knowledge. This external paradigm in which the subject is placed forces an opposition (the *difference* of genus and difference) between subjects. The ironic problem within this process is the constant redefining of the subject and the external paradigm in which the subject is placed. Rather than the subject being defined in its absolute specificity (in its individual essence, the *unthought*), the status of the subject is contingent upon the fields which define the subject. These fields, however, rely on a preexisting notion of the subject which, in turn, is transformed by the very field in which the preexisting notion of the subject was provided. In turn, the field must

redefine (efface and reconstruct) itself through the very process it entails. Therefore, each time the field (psychology, medicine, etc.) attempts to grasp what the subject is in regards to that field, the subject is pushed away, leaving behind only the residual objectified portion of itself which provides the basis for the historical notions of the field. Never is the subject defined in the present; therefore, the field is only valid historically, never actually capturing the subjectivity of the subject. Each field of knowledge (episteme) constantly attempts, without success, to "find a way around the primacy of representation," and the various social epistemes "find themselves treating as their object what is in fact their condition of possibility."³⁹

Foucault discovers through his investigation of the social sciences as a branch of discourse stemming from the three sciences that the subject has become contained as the human being, a finite agent within the world of objects rather than an infinite soul defined by the mysterious infinitude of Spirit. The finite subject may only be known and defined in its finitude in the modern era, for the finite nature of the subject causes its capacity to know to be limited. The collapse of the subject into its finite shell causes a collapse of knowledge, indicating that there is a limit within the subject which must remain unknown. The unknown then becomes a point of individuation within the subject, distinguishing the subject from all other subjects. At this point begins the problematization of epistemology and ethics, for both must be defined based on the finitude of the subject, since both find their basis within the subject itself. Both fields of discourse, however, define the subject as epistemological and ethical. This is Foucault's primary contention with Kant and his attempt to define the subject as limited, utilizing the limited nature of the subject to define the possibilities of knowledge and ethics. The modern subject becomes both transcendental and empirical, torn within itself as that which must know and that which cannot know, that which must act in a specific manner and that which cannot know what that specific manner is in which to act. "[T]he relation between man's being and his reflection is itself a source of progressive puzzles, and worse, the seat of an inevitable moral paralysis."⁴⁰

What Foucault reveals in its profundity is not simply the death of man, but rather the fact that the human sciences must kill the subject in order to give birth to man. Once the unknown and mystical infinite had been dissipated in favor of finite fields of knowledge, the subject, rather than God, became the condition of its own possibility.⁴¹ This emergence of the subject as man, however, was also the inevitable destruction of the subject, for the subject became that which could only remain unknown, hidden, mystical, and before representation, thereby objectifying man, and causing the "absolute dispersion of man."⁴² The dream has been disposed of, thrown into the "Boneyard of names,"⁴³ an object among the various other objects of

discourse, stripped of its subjectivity, catalogued and ordered, left with nothing but the body as its carcass and actuality.

*If it weren't for prisons, we would know that we are all already in prison.*⁴⁴

From Foucault's analysis of knowledge and its power over the subject, particularly its power over the body, an interrelation emerges in which one begins to realize that knowledge and power are a "general mechanism of power" localized on the body in Western society. Although this mechanism of power is often enforced within the institution, for example, the clinic, Foucault does not focus primarily on institutions of power in and of themselves. Rather, Foucault's focus begins to encompass the general "growth of technologies of power" in which the subject is created and redistributed as an object of power; an object subjugated to the control of power.⁴⁵ Foucault's expression of the ironic forces of power, however, shifts from a negative irony, expressed as an objectification of the subject, to a positive irony in which the subject is granted subjective sovereignty though the goal of power is to objectify the subject.

Discipline and Punish signifies this shift of irony in Foucault's system of genealogy. By historically reconstructing the development of the penal and disciplinary systems, Foucault reveals the way in which humanitarian action, an offspring of the social sciences, has the opposite effect of its intention. The criminal, becoming a psyche rather than a body in the modern era, is subjectified when the intent of punishment is to rehabilitate the criminal as object. In opposition, the victims of crime, at one time embodied by the subjectivity of the sovereign, become objectified as nothing more than targets of the criminal's action.⁴⁶ Although the prison, with all of its categorizing and purposeful placement of the body through strategies of power, intends to place the criminal in its objectivity outside of society, that criminal finds a society of transgressive subjectivity within the prison. The prisoner is offered a space of freedom within the confines of punishment in which to construct an identity free of the fields of knowledge within society. About this aspect of the prison Foucault is silent, for his genealogical juxtaposition of the penal and disciplinary systems offers a voice itself that explains the irony of the two systems of power. On the sovereignty of the subject granted by the prison, Jean Genet is most illuminating:

Prison offers the same sense of security to the convict as does a royal palace to a king's guest. They are the two buildings constructed with the most faith, those which give the greatest certainty of being what they are--which are what they are meant to be, and which they remain . . . The prison surrounds me with a perfect guarantee . . . The rigor of the rules, their strictness, their precision, are in essence the same as the etiquette of a royal court, as the exquisite and tyrannical politeness of which a guest

at that court is the object. The foundations of the palace, like those of the prison, inhere in the fine quality of the stone, in marble stairways, in real gold, in carvings, the rarest in the realm, in the absolute power of their hosts; but they are also similar in that these two structures are one the root and the other the crest of a living system circulating between these two poles which contain it, compress it and which are sheer force . . . The prison remains sure of itself, and you in the midst of it sure of yourself.⁴⁷

The punitive society, completely free of ethical demands while simultaneously filled with the royal appearance of tradition and atemporality, places the criminal within its existential field of freedom that is meant to impose order. The society that the criminal is rejected from, however, is ordered as a binding structure with the intention of liberating, but actually restricts its members within its temporality, its stress on normality, and its ethical demands.⁴⁸ The members of society become objectified within their grid of power (family, work, the state), and the members of the penal society become subjectified when stripped of this grid of power. The criminal is no longer looked upon as a psychological, medical, or biological body. Each strata of power has the opposite effect of what is intended. The disciplinary object of lawful society becomes the subject of the penal society. The dream (subject) regains its power within the confines of the prison, emerging from the fallen clothing of the epistemes of society, naked in its purity as the individual delinquent among an army of delinquents who have reasserted their individual subjectivity outside the margins of objective understanding and power.⁴⁹

Foucault glamorises death as "the most secret, the most 'private' point of existence," and death by suicide, very logically, as the ultimate act of protest against the impersonal and pervasive apparatuses of power.⁵⁰

In an individual case of the transgressive nature of the criminal, Foucault displays the extreme case of Pierre Riviere. Not only does this case prove the transgressive power of the criminal, violently stripping power back to itself, but the case also opposes humanist ideology. If humanist ideology posits the idea of treating the criminal as a psyche of society that must be reformed in life, it has no response to the criminal who wishes for death. Pierre Riviere, unlike the case of Gilles de Rais,⁵¹ does not seek redemption from society; rather, he seeks death, transgressing the order of punishment in seeking resentment against himself. Riviere thereby asserts his subjectivity through his choice of death over acceptance by society. Regarding Riviere, no rules of social science apply. He returns to the state of the dream, in essence, pure subjectivity, by neither placing himself inside or outside the realm of society, but rather refusing intersubjectivity as a whole. In creating "a discourse so strong and so strange" which accompanies his crime, Riviere erases his crime and his punishment at once. His

writing becomes the objectified subject of society which pushes the confines of normalization to their limit. Riviere transgresses the limits of normalization; his subjectivity is reasserted in his leap towards death as he is simultaneously stripped of both his authorship of his crime and his discourse on his crime. His subjectivity is regained through the authorship of his death.⁵²

The case of Pierre Riviere reveals an important aspect of the objectification of the subject and its status in the field of the social sciences. Contradicting the modern notions of knowledge and discourse on truth, Foucault succeeds in drawing "'a map' of the struggle between and within the various legal, medical, and moral discourses." This "dramatic struggle" illuminates the essential problematization of the subject between the social sciences.⁵³ Each defines the subject in opposition to the definition of the subject within a different field of discourse. Only the subject who escapes discourse is defined in its sovereign individuality. The social sciences feign granting freedom in the life of society while granting freedom only through one's death from society.⁵⁴

What Foucault reaches with his studies of the penal systems, disciplinary systems, and Pierre Riviere is a realization of subjectivity through transgression. This transgression, although political and sociological, is ethical at its core. Transgression, in its essential nature as that which surpasses preestablished limits, leads Foucault into the realm of sexuality and outside of the institution, for one finds the act of transgression at the root of sexual activity itself.

*I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you-- the objet petit a-- I mutilate you.*⁵⁵

The field of sexuality is a field of power in which the subject and society assert their power over one another to the point of enveloping the other, or attempting to strip oneself of the power of the other. The sexual act is not ethical in regards to the body itself or pleasure itself. The sexual act is instead revealed as being ethical in its penetration, in essence, in the subject's role as an active or passive party.⁵⁶ Sexuality is the beginning point for Foucault's analysis of ethics because it is one of the elements within power relations "endowed with the greatest instrumentality." From its birth in the simplicity of penetration, sexuality serves as a basis, bridge, and strategic breaking point in the maneuvers of power and intersubjectivity.⁵⁷ Due to its multiplicitous and confrontational nature, sexuality has become a locus of power which leads discourse on sexuality to become misleading, often understood as absolute while its history reveals it to be absolutely contingent.

As Foucault discovers, not only are the discourses on sexuality misleading; the "standard dynamics of liberation and repression are distorted and misleading" as

well.⁵⁸ Just as Nietzsche had investigated the roots of morality, Foucault's *History of Sexuality* investigates the objects of ethical discourse. He locates the various moments when specific behaviors of the subject, and finally the subject itself, became objects of ethical discourse. Within this genealogy, Foucault is not attempting, just as Nietzsche had not attempted, to promulgate an alternative "universal code that regulates in any detail right and wrong, good and evil."⁵⁹ Foucault rather traces the lineage of ethical influence in order to reveal the points of objectification in regards to the subject; and this includes, and primarily concerns, the ethical subject.

In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault reveals what we may consider to be the transitional moment between the existence of the subject as sovereign and the subject as an object of ethical discourse. Beginning with the work of Artemidorus, the reader is lead (with the help of Foucault's summarizing) into an analysis of dreams which does not posit value judgments and moral claims, but rather concerns "procedures of decipherment and the method of analysis."⁶⁰ This instructional guidebook indicates the value placed on the "care of the self by the self" that dominated the ancient Greek world. Within this work, however, there is an essential problematization of *aphrodisia* (sexual love) that initiates the subject's descent into objectivity, for this problematization involves the subject's engagement as a social actor through the interpretation of dreams in which the subject is a sexual actor.⁶¹ This role of importance placed upon the combination of the subject as a social and sexual actor spurs the ethical objectification of the subject.

The analysis of dreams by Artemidorus, Foucault reveals, begins the transition from ethics of the self to sexual ethics which demand conformity to a specific norm within society, "a certain art of living which defines the aesthetic and ethical criteria of existence . . . which refers more and more to universal principles of nature or reason, which everyone must observe in the same way, whatever their social status."⁶² The problematization of *aphrodisia*, in its origins being merely advice for the subject's modality of living, leads to the problematization of penetration and exhaustion,⁶³ the problematization of marriage,⁶⁴ and the problematization of sexual relations between partners of the same sex.⁶⁵ From this transition in which sexual activity is placed within the ethical realm, Foucault discovers the emergence of what he refers to as the four axes of experience: the relation to one's body, the relation to one's wife, the relation to boys, and the relation to truth.⁶⁶ Through a progressive trend that begins with the analysis of the dream, sexuality is pathologized. The sexual subject is revealed as being a constructed object of ethical discourse who has not always existed, but rather has emerged from a long history in which the human's present existence as human achieves a rational form that rests on the unbalanced masks of ethical subjectivity imposed in forms varying from Galen's discourse on sexual activity to the apotheosis of moral discourse in Christianity. In the same way that madness is

revealed as an object of negative operations, separating the subject from society, sexuality is revealed as a positive operation, providing the subject with a unity based upon reason which ultimately objectifies the subject.⁶⁷ Foucault's motive is not simply to establish the history of sexual ethics as a constructed modality of power. His objective is to eradicate domination by unmasking it and revealing its truth.⁶⁸

An analysis of the Western construction of ethical subjectivity is neither an attempt by Foucault to return to the Greek style of life, nor an attempt to negate completely the possibility of subjectivity. Foucault does not direct the reader towards a certain form of subjectivity which avoids objectivity. His work instead directs the reader away from practices of objectification and towards a practice of *paideia*, or an enlightened education, that regards the process of subjectification as art.⁶⁹ Foucault rejects the confines of humanism, transgressing the subjectivity of compromise through a "critique of and an alternative to modern self-subjugation."⁷⁰

Foucault, in the same fashion as Nietzsche, rejects the idea of a stable, constant subject.⁷¹ The subject, for Foucault, is not an entity with an essence, but an entity which is self-fashioning, constantly redefining itself in its contact with the world. The irony of the subject is that despite its autonomy, the subject is always "moulded by outside forces and attempting to fashion others."⁷² There is, however, a significant difference between the subject as object of discourse and the subject as an artistic, self-fashioning subjectivity. This difference rests on the Nietzschean notion of *aufheben* and the ancient Greek notion of *parrhesia*.

Aufheben (*sublimare* in Latin) "involves a simultaneous preserving, canceling, and lifting up."⁷³ In order to understand how this notion of *aufheben* is utilized in Foucault's self-fashioning subjectivity, it is necessary to analyze the subject through a Nietzschean lens. If we understand Nietzsche's first form of Dionysus to be a symbol for the subject as dream, and the form of Apollo to symbolize the rational order imposed upon the subject by the world (society), then we may understand *aufheben* to refer to the second form of Dionysus in the *Birth of Tragedy*. The subject that is self-fashioned, that has invented itself, is the synthesis of the first Dionysus (immediate, uncontrolled passion) and Apollo (control without passion; reason).⁷⁴ The Apollonian subject is the subject advocated by humanism, for it is the subject ruled by reason rather than passion. The humanist subject has its roots "in a Platonic rank-ordering that has tyrannically subordinated the appetites and passions to the rule of reason."⁷⁵ Foucault rejects this notion of subjectivity as a feigned power of agency, granting power only over others in regards to compromise, but granting no power over the subject's own subjectivity.⁷⁶

A progression of the subject to the level of the second Nietzschean Dionysus is the disapproval of Habermas' claim that Foucault offers only totalized critique without a

standard of subjectivity.⁷⁷ Foucault does not reject subjectivity as a whole. Rather, he acknowledges the subjectivity of the subject which has fashioned itself from its genealogical education. Critique does not destroy the subject; it allows the subject to learn how it has been composed in order to destroy and overcome the traditional notion of subjectivity. This final synthesis in the creation of the subject (which is never final in the subject's constant refashioning of itself) is fulfilled through the act of *parrhesia*; and it is *parrhesia*, not reason, that provides Foucault with the unity of his theorizing and practice.⁷⁸

Because the subject is placed within the world, each subject must engage in intersubjectivity. But Foucault does not rely on the subject to retain its subjectivity within the intersubjective relationship by restoring the "centrality of practical reason to political discourse."⁷⁹ The subject retains its subjectivity in its parrhesiastic act, in essence, in its imaginative expression of truth at the risk of losing its subjectivity. The parrhesiast regains his/her power over the domination of outside force, for s/he has combined knowledge of oneself with knowledge of the world, expressing this synthesis of knowledge as discourse. In speaking one's mind, the parrhesiast alters her/his subjectivity in the present, engaged in "elaboration of self by self."⁸⁰ The passion of Dionysus is combined with the rational order of Apollonian thinking, and both are overcome through the ever-changing action of the subject.

Skepticism, a noun that has crossed out its etymology and all etymology, is not indubitable doubt; it is not simply nihilist negation: rather, irony.⁸¹

What Foucault has offered is not a specific definition of subjectivity. He has presented, through his ironic critique of the modern subject, a method by which the subject fashions itself. In a final stroke of irony, Foucault does not impose his idea of subjectivity upon the subject, but rather offers a space in which the subject is without definition. This lack of definition offers the possibility of subjectivity which transcends objectivity while not relying on absolute or essential ideas of the subject. By not committing the "Cartesian fallacy" of advocating a specific form of the subject that negates subjectivity in the emergence of the objective "I" or ego, Foucault succeeds in saving the subject.⁸² In opposition to Rorty and Habermas, Foucault's lack of positive commitment to the rational subject does not erase subjectivity from epistemological, ethical, or political discourse. The lacuna which the subject embodies (and which embodies the subject), in fact, becomes the possibility and basis of this discourse.

Through his genealogical analysis, Foucault reveals that the subject is Narcissus of the dream, the Minotaur within the labyrinths of criminal transgression, and finally, the *aufheben* of Dionysus and Apollo, regaining its status of subjectivity through the

transgressive act of *parrhesia*. The dream does not remain the immediacy of passion; rather, through its *paideia* with the world, combines its passion with the order it has learned, screaming itself into subjectivity through the mouth of *parrhesia*, bursting forth from Plato's cave.

Endnotes

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