

The Subject of Reason

by Jeremy Hutchison

Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	5
Truth and exclusion	8
The problem of recognition	10
Recognition and the humanist subject of reason	14
Biopower and the Foucauldian subject of reason	23
Government and the Foucauldian subject of reason	31
The problem of ethics	39
(In)Conclusion	45
Bibliography	47

Abstract

Embedded in the title of this essay is a linguistic ambiguity that turns around a simple word: 'of'. This preposition sits rather awkwardly between the nouns to its either side; what exactly does 'of' mean in this instance? Does it suggest that *the subject* is the author of reason? Read differently, might it not equally connote that he is authored by it? By extension, are we as rational human subjects the *architects of* that rationality, or are we *constructed by* it? Moreover, does reason precede human existence, or emerge through it? The present analysis sets out to examine precisely these questions. It is a fruitful line of inquiry since it illustrates a divergence that runs deep through Western philosophy. Indeed, since there will not be space successfully to explore the full permutations available, this analysis will be limited to the genealogist Michel Foucault's revision of the transcendental humanist subject. It will inquire how successfully his epistemological 'Man' is pitted against its modernist counterpart, how the rationality of Foucault's mutable subject emerges through the contingent, variable discursive practices of its historical era, and ultimately to what extent this runs counter to an Enlightenment project that is based, broadly speaking, on the attainment of freedom through knowledge. Does the fragmentation of truth necessitate the abandonment of all forms of rationality; does his subject become an anti-modernist nihilist? Some space will be lent to examine how successfully Foucault weathers the complaints levelled at his genealogical methodology: where this methodology falls short, the thinking of his fellow genealogist Gilles Deleuze will be applied to analyse the foundation of the humanist subject. Finally, this essay will ask to what extent Foucault's non-essential subject of reason, stripped of

any immanent truth, is dispossessed of its claim to freedom – or better equipped to realize it.

“The human being alone has the consciousness of truth and justice and love, which is the consciousness of God.”¹

¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, tr. Benjamin Jowett, Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org

Introduction

For Plato, man was created in the image of God. At his very essence, man therefore possesses the truth of his transcendental creator. The goal (*telos*) of human life is to reunite with this metaphysical truth via the recollection of his inner transcendental knowledge. As such, a return to this essence is central to human salvation (*sōtēria*), and lays the foundation of humanist thought. This is no easy task, producing what Plato describes as ‘*the pains of childbirth, from which [the soul] must be delivered, or she will never really attain truth.*’² However, once introduced to philosophy, this longing for an emancipatory truth can be seen to resonate throughout Western discourse, finding echoes in the Greek *paideia* (cultural education), the Christian *apokatastasis* (restoration of all beings), even as far as the Marxist revolution.

But the nineteenth-Century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche views this cultural thirst for truth through a deeply critical lens. Every truth, after all, has an author. This author might – consciously or unconsciously – confirm his own identity through the creation of ‘truths’. Equally, that author might suppress any potentially disruptive elements – difference or otherness – that do not align with his own identity. What therefore starts to emerge is a picture of inclusion and exclusion, a rigid dialectic between truth and non-truth. In my last essay, I introduced some of the ways in which Michel Foucault furthers

² Plato, ‘*The Complete Works of Plato, Volume II, Letter II.* 313a-b, tr. Glenn R. Morrow, p.455

this Nietzschean project. In his genealogical reading of historical discourse, Foucault articulates the ways in which arbitrary events can be stitched together to form a smooth continuous narrative, or a '*formless unity of a great becoming*'³. Between the lines of the historian's narrative, political discourse can be reinforced; the present can be legitimized by means of the past. The arbitrary formation of our own time can be sanctioned by an epistemological continuity: a seamless flow of cause and effect. As such, the historian's account can assume a teleological authority, offering a sense that *this was the only way things could have been*, and by implication *this is the only way things can be*. Since I have made these deductions elsewhere, the present analysis will move forward by asking how this '*will to truth*'⁴, impacts on the human subject. How does this truth-giving tendency affect the way that we - human beings - experience life? The genealogist's response is woeful: human history is reported in a way that is profoundly alien to human life.

*"The world we know is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events."*⁵

According to Foucault, the problem with any essentialist discourse of truth lies not simply in what it *includes* (an arguably over-determined portrait of our entangled human existence) but rather what it *excludes*. For example, what about the events, places and agents that were left out of these historical texts, and abandoned by history? What about

³ Foucault, Michel, '*The Order of Discourse*', Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p.68

⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich, '*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*', New York, Dover Publications Inc, 1998, p.23

⁵ Foucault, Michel, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' *From modernism to postmodernism: an anthology*, by Lawrence E. Cahoon, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006

alternative modes of rationality that did not fit into the governing account? How *else* might things have been? As we shall come to examine, the will to truth, which Foucault describes as '*that prodigious machinery designed to exclude*',⁶ places devastating strictures on human subjectivity: firstly, on how it is understood to have come into being, and as a consequence, on how it is conceived in the present. Therefore, forms of discourse that buttress ideas of immanence, progress and rationality - to the exclusion of other rationalities - meet the genealogist's intense scrutiny. This could be seen to pit the genealogical project squarely against humanism, modernity, and the Enlightenment.

⁶ Ibid., p.56

Truth and exclusion

‘The problem is not changing people’s consciousness [...] but the political, economic institutional regime of the production of truth [...] The political question [...] is not error, illusion, alienated consciousness or ideology; it is truth itself.’⁷

At base, we might consider the prime function of Foucauldian genealogy not to uncover truths, but its virtual opposite: to problematize the very idea of truth. To effect this discursive unravelling, the genealogist must abandon all philosophical assumptions, question ‘obviousness’, dissect reason. This is a project that reveals the process whereby arbitrary ways of thinking are made invisible or *naturalized*, to become generally accepted matters of reason or truth⁸. As such, his objective is not so much to recover the agents and events lost in the exclusionary processes of history, but to expose those processes themselves: the ‘*analysis of descent*’⁹ in the traditional historical project. To put it another way, while the traditional historian searches for identity (the essence of human behaviour, the unfolding of teleology), the genealogist searches for *difference*. He discards notions of soul, essence, or metaphysicality in favour of a fragmented subjectivity. Under his gaze, the human subject merely becomes a temporary formation of disassociated parts, an amalgam of historically- and culturally-specific modes of rationality. We might therefore conceive of Foucault’s subject of reason as a synthesis of historically constructed rationalities that perpetually displace one another: it includes those with which it

⁷ Edward Saïd, ‘An Ethics of Language: Review of Michel Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*’, in Barry Smart (ed.) *Michel Foucault: critical assessments, Volume 2*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.87

⁸ Nietzsche called truth that ‘*self-contented and happy creature which is continually assuring all the powers that be that no one needs to be the least concerned on its account; for it is, after all, only “pure knowledge”*’ (quoted in 16p135).

⁹ Foucault, Michel, ‘*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*’ in ‘*From modernism to postmodernism: an anthology*’, by Lawrence E. Cahoone, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006, p.242

identifies, it excludes those with which it does not. In this analysis, the tendency to exclude goes right to the core of the human psyche:

*'Where the soul pretends unification or the self presents a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning... What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin, it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.'*¹⁰

Here, genealogy assumes an unmistakably foundationalist tone; '*the historical beginning of things*' alludes to the origin of cognition. It suggests that difference and disparity lie at the heart of human subjectivity. One might therefore expect a thorough interrogation of cognition to ensue, where the genealogist will ask exactly *why* the human mind conceals disparity behind coherence, and difference behind identity. Furthermore, having described the *fact* of exclusion as an operating principle, perhaps he will explain why it is that historians inevitably tend towards it. But he does not. As we shall later examine, Foucault's work in the 1970s interrogates the socio-cultural *impact* of exclusionary procedures, and investigates much of the psychology behind these. However when it comes to identifying the fundamental psychic motivation for this tendency, the genealogist might be said to meet his own limits. Without an understanding of the psychological processes governing the formation of human subjectivity, Foucault's analysis of the *historical beginning of things* is notably incomplete. To access this more fundamental level, we must therefore turn to his fellow genealogist, Gilles Deleuze.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.243

The problem of recognition

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze explores the automatic tendency towards inclusion and exclusion that is an operational characteristic of human subjectivity. In the third chapter of this work, his criticism concentrates on the analysis of a damagingly restrictive '*image of thought*'. Here, Deleuzian genealogy does not simply investigate the conditions whereby inclusion and exclusion are made possible, it dissects the way in which the human mind actually 'sees'. As James Williams points out, this will become vital for any argument that aims to critique traditional, exclusionary models of thought:

*'Without a critique of this image [of thought] and without an effort to replace it by a form of thought open to difference and repetition, this damaging effect will continue and strengthen.'*¹¹

Deleuzian genealogy therefore fills an essential gap: his project concerns not simply the *effect* of thought - and whether events in history books are related via more or less exclusionary accounts - but the *character* of thought itself. To this end, Deleuze takes issue with the basic root of modern philosophy: the Cartesian *Cogito ergo sum*. Since this acts as the foundation humanist subject, it is vital for the present analysis.

In his *Meditations*, Descartes famously establishes the beginning of modern philosophy: *I think, therefore I am*. In simple terms, this suggests that if a human subject is able to

¹¹ Williams, James, '*Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*', Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, p.111

doubt his existence, then he must exist. For if he is able to doubt, then by implication there must be an *I* that is able to *think*. But for Deleuze, this implication is highly problematic. What, after all, does it actually *mean* to think?

*‘When the philosopher says “I think therefore I am”, he can assume that the universality of his premises - namely, what it means to be and to think - will be implicitly understood, and that no one can deny that to doubt is to think, and to think is to be.’*¹² (My underlining)

If the task of philosophy is to refute automatic assumptions, then any implicit understanding represents a methodological weakness. Worse, should a philosophical treaty concerning the origin of rational thought itself hinge around a matter of common sense, it can be considered unqualified, and ironically so. Deleuze confirms Western philosophy’s unstable foundation in understated terms: *“The implicit presupposition of philosophy may be found in the idea of a common sense as Cogitatio natura universalis. On this basis, philosophy is able to begin.”*¹³ The stakes are high: should Deleuze demonstrate that the very idea of thought is contingent on an assumption about a common sense, the basic starting point of philosophy begins to break apart. By extension, it risks dissolving ideas of truth, reason, and most importantly, the humanist subject itself.

In order to address these concerns, we might usefully begin with some basic questions: Why do we think? What forces us to do so? For Deleuze, thought begins with an *encounter*. This encounter takes place on a level that is pre-thought, pre-cognition, and by

¹² Deleuze, Gilles, *‘Difference and Repetition’*, Paris: Presse Universitaires de France , 1968, p.130

¹³ Ibid., p131

implication pre-philosophy. At this initial encounter, each of our independent faculties engages with the *object* of that encounter: an object that ‘*can only be sensed*’¹⁴. But no object can ever be definitively grasped, completely trained, wholly known; this sensory exploration is a continual process, a historical coming-into-being. To some extent, the object of encounter is therefore *insensible* – endlessly evasive, permanently unknowable. Deleuze refers to a ‘*discord of the faculties*’¹⁵ that takes place around this object of encounter. Each independent faculty engages in limitless exploration, free from the alignment of a *common* (i.e. unifying) sense. Perhaps it is helpful here to conceive of a multiplicity of divergent strands of sensory experience, characterized by coexisting contraries and paradoxes, caught in an endlessly inconclusive state of *becoming*.

He goes on to describe how the arrival of thought enacts a violent terminus of this process. Thought necessitates the sublation of these contraries and paradoxes. Divergent sensory experiences are forced into coherent thought by a *common* sense that predetermines - and limits - actual experience. As such, a sensory-*process*-in-time is artificially arrested into a frozen cognitive *state*. The object of encounter thus becomes an object of *recognition*; not something to be sensed, but rather to be recalled, imagined, conceived according to our pre-existing categories of understanding. With an object of recognition we are reconfirmed and reaffirmed in relation to that which we already understand. In such a place no real thought takes place; we are simply bound to identifying the known. This image of thought based on recognition suggests a conservative process that, according to Williams, “*depends on identifying something anew*”

¹⁴ Ibid., p.139

¹⁵ Ibid., p.141

*by comparing it with what is already known or what has already been experienced.*¹⁶ By implication, any image of thought that depends on a principle of recognition discards the new. Thought, at its very root, is exclusionary. For Deleuze, true thought – the actual awareness of things – can be attained only via a destruction of recognition, a disarticulation of that common, unifying, sense:

*[A philosophy] would discover its authentic repetition in a thought without Image, even at the cost of the greatest destructions and demoralizations, and a philosophical obstinacy with no ally but paradox, one which would have to renounce both the form of representation and the element of common sense.*¹⁷

This topic of recognition leads us to a basic root of poststructuralist thought. It is here that we encounter genealogy's fundamental quarrel with the Hegelian, Kantian humanist subject. According to Nietzsche, the '*indelible model of recognition*' left Kant and Hegel little more than '*philosophical labourers*'¹⁸ - servants of hegemonic rule. Deleuze concurs, jeering that '*far from overturning the form of common sense, Kant merely multiplied it.*'¹⁹ Can this attack truly be warranted? While space will not allow for an extended analysis, for the purposes of this essay we shall now seek to define the image of thought in Kantian philosophy. While this is a complicated task, it is justified; we will see to what extent the Enlightenment philosopher's dependence on common sense acts as an operating principle behind human reason. By extension we shall consider how it might be used to

¹⁶ Williams, James, '*Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*', p.118

¹⁷ Deleuze, Gilles, '*Difference and Repetition*', Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1968, p.132

¹⁸ Ibid., p136

¹⁹ Ibid., p137

buttress the rationality of political hegemony, and thereby repress – rather than liberate – the humanist subject.

Recognition and the humanist subject of reason

To begin with, Kant states that pure judgements of taste are determined by a shared sense of universal validity, or social necessity. *“The beautiful is that which... is cognized as object of a necessary delight.”*²⁰ Within this framework, thought is seen to operate as a monitor of social benefit. This lends thought a moral, upright character. However, this morality is not something learnt or internalized from without; a person’s judgements of taste, the moral philosopher confirms, *“must have a subjective principle, and one which determines what pleases or displeases, by means of a feeling only and not through concepts, but yet with universal validity.”*²¹ In other words, while judgement operates in a subjective sensory realm, it is ultimately made possible by a particular form of rationality that is universally shared by human beings: common sense. *“The judgement of taste depends on our presupposing the existence of a common sense... Only under the presupposition, I repeat, of such a common sense, are we able to lay down a judgement of taste.”*²² These last two citations appear to reflect Kant’s fundamental assumption that humans share one particular form of rationality and basic psychology. For Kant, this shared and innate common sense forms the limits of what can – and should – be rationalised. Furthermore, as an innate human moral gauge, common sense can be discovered by transcendental arguments. But Deleuze calls this transcendental deduction into question. After all, in order to encounter a transcendental morality, we would require a faculty of transcendental recognition. But while the term ‘recognition’ *does* appear in Kantian

²⁰ Kant, Immanuel, ‘*Critique of Judgement*’, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p.85

²¹ Ibid., p.83

²² Ibid., p.86

thought, it is used to suggest re-cognition, or recollection²³. This is not the recognition of a transcendental order, but as Kant himself acknowledges, precisely the form of self-rediscovery that Deleuze outlined above: a complacent rediscovery of the subject's internal consciousness, where difference is reduced to the same. Thus Deleuze interprets Kant's apparently transcendental deduction as little more than a standard psychological procedure, a projection of his own empirical subjectivity:

*'Kant traces the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness, and the transcendental synthesis of apprehension is directly induced from an empirical apprehension'*²⁴.

If this is so, then any 'transcendental' arguments reveal only Kant's own rationality and the limits of what he can think, not the limits of rationality in general. By implication, other forms of rationality, sensibility and morality may occur in the equally valid constituting ground of another subject's consciousness. On this basis, the assumption of a universal rationality or common sense is flawed.

It is easy to see how this theoretical dilemma at the heart of the Kantian subject becomes the object of acerbic criticism from Foucault's genealogical analysis. After all, without an instrument of transcendental deduction, who becomes the author of any universal human rationality? What authority distinguishes the universally valid and the socially necessary from the *invalid* and the socially *unnecessary*? Perhaps we can start to see how an image of thought that is oriented around a principle of common sense could usefully serve the

²³ Andrew Brook provides a detailed explanation of Kantian recognition in his book *'Kant and the Mind'*, Cambridge University Press 1997. See the section beginning on p.128 *'Synthesis of recognition in a concept'*

²⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, *'Difference and Repetition'*, Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 1968, p.135

cause of a political hegemony. After all the arbitrary, corrupt, or exploitative reason of any despotic political hegemony could be legitimized by dominant ideas of essential social necessity. Indeed as countless critics have pointed out, when Kant's theory of universal rationality enters the reality of the socio-political realm, it can be accused of legitimizing the tactics of totalitarian regimes.²⁵

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that this critique of psychological recognition exclusively operates in the realm of anti-humanist poststructuralist radicals, such as Deleuze. Lest we reach some easy conclusion that a humanist / poststructuralist argument diverges around images of thought based on principles of recognition and non-recognition, we should take a close look at more recent proponents of humanist thought. The Neo-Marxist social theorists at the Frankfurt school identified recognition at the root of ideology itself. In his book *Ideology*, the Marxist Terry Eagleton explains that

*'Fredric Jameson has suggested that the fundamental gesture of all ideology is exactly such a rigid binary opposition between the self or familiar, which is positively valorized, and the non-self or alien, which is thrust beyond the boundaries of intelligibility. The ethical code of good versus evil, so Jameson considers, is then the most exemplary model of this principle.'*²⁶ (My underlining)

For Jameson, not only does ideology's oppositional logic make the human subject wary of the non-self or the non-recognized, it propels this non-recognized *beyond the boundaries of intelligibility*. In other words, that which cannot be *recognized* cannot be

²⁵ For example, Michael Halberstam's *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics*, Yale University Press, 2000

²⁶ Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London: Verso, 1991, p.126

cognized in the first place. This form of self-enclosing thought inspires conformity, and thus confirms ideology's ultimate aim, to actually make it impossible to conceive of anything that does not fall into its ideological field. In the second phase of the Frankfurt school, Theodor Adorno continues this line of inquiry, suggesting that '*identity-thinking*²⁷' is the mechanical driver of ideology. He explains that ideology either morphs the non-recognized '*plurality of things into a mere simulacrum of itself, or expels them beyond its own borders in a panic-stricken act of exclusion*²⁸'. This is evidenced by neat reifactory binaries such as valid / invalid, necessary / unnecessary: the type of operating categories that underpin modern capitalism. Given that this body of Neo-Marxist theorists (like their Marxist predecessors) set out to analyse the conditions of possibility for social emancipation, what alternative did they propose to an image of thought based on recognition? How does the human subject locate himself within the field of discourse, free from the rigid binaries of identity-thinking (recognition / non-recognition). How, in other words, are we to think?

Adorno explains that the aim of a socialist revolution is to liberate thought from the neat binaries of capitalist ideology. His *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (co-authored with Max Horkheimer) investigates the methods whereby this might be made possible:

*'Reconciliation would release the non-identical, would rid it of coercion... it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them.'*²⁹

²⁷ Sherratt, Yvonne, '*Adorno's Positive Dialectic*', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.196

²⁸ Eagleton, Terry, '*Ideology: An Introduction*', p.126

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.127

But how can this project be put into effect? Any critique of ideology requires tools of analytic reason, tools that are in themselves intrinsically contaminated by the oppressive rationality of domination. Thus, as Adorno is eventually forced to concede *'Simply to think is to be guiltily complicit with ideological domination; yet to surrender instrumental thought would be to lapse into barbarous irrationalism.'*³⁰ At this juncture, the subject of reason is left with a disappointing choice between a rationality contaminated by ideological manipulation, and pure irrationality. The question therefore remains; how can progressive emancipation be uttered? How are we to articulate, or even *think*, in terms that are not polluted by ideological rationality?

This dilemma in communicative language is acknowledged by a later arrival to the Frankfurt school: the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. His observations are usefully condensed by Terry Eagleton, who summarises that for Habermas, *'ideology marks the point at which language is bent out of communicative shape by the power interests which impinge upon it.'*³¹ Domination is here described as an operating principle within our speech, a force that bends language it out of shape. But Eagleton points out, this image carries strong implications: *'If ideology is language wrenched out of true, then we must presumably have some idea of what an 'authentic' communicative act would look like.'*³² Any kind of distortion implies the existence of some latent rationality underlying in our speech. It carries the promise of a utopian situation where speech can be liberated from the constraints of domination, where the exchange and deployment of speech acts would be free, fair and equal. Evidently, our current political form of life prohibits us from this

³⁰ Adorno, Theodor; Horkheimer, Max; Smidt Noerr, Gunzelin; *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments*, California: Stanford University Press, 2002, p.202

³¹ Eagleton, Terry, *'Ideology: An Introduction'*, p129

³² *Ibid.*, p130

redemption: power is ubiquitous, in one form or another. Habermas seems to suggest that social and ideological domination must be abolished before we can truthfully speak. Only with this new revolutionary social formation can we speak something like the truth. But again, if the entire realm of verbal language is manipulated and misshapen by the forces of domination, how can the subject of reason possibly revolt against them? How can he speak about revolution? How can he even think about it in the first place? Unless it is introduced in from some remote ontological beyond, this emancipated rationality seems to rely on a highly problematic utopian ideal. Here, humanist thought seems to arrive at an impasse; the humanist subject is frozen to the spot, incapacitated from political activity. What alternative does the radical genealogist propose as a form of liberated, revolutionary rationality?

In simple terms, he does not. Theoretically at least, the genealogist does not propose any *alternative* rationality. He assumes what Habermas somewhat scathingly dubbed an anti-modern, anti-enlightenment³³ position. Indeed, rather than directing a critical reading towards some kind of ultimate reconciliation, the genealogist's stance assumes a *non-critical, non-prescriptive* relativism. As Derek Hook points out,

*'Critical readings will prove inadequate: looking at what can be shown to be within the text is insufficient because alternative 'showings' will always be possible.'*³⁴

³³ Critchley, Simon; Schroeder, William Ralph, *A companion to continental philosophy*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999, p.410

³⁴ Hook, Dr. Derek, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power (Critical Theory and Practice in Psychology and the Human Sciences)*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p.128

Here, we might usefully remind ourselves that the genealogist engages in the study of exteriority. Unlike the Marxist theorist, he does not seek to bring about a revolution based on a liberationist rationality that proscribes the suspension of power relations in language and society. It is important to remember that genealogy examines the *conditions* of truth, rather than truth itself. But how authentic is this ambition? Do not the genealogist's selected themes, procedures and areas of investigation automatically assemble the analytical instruments of a new discourse? Put simply, does not the study of truth risk engendering its *own* truth? Rather than posing as a neutral player, perhaps Foucault would do better to acknowledge his moral agenda, enter the battlefield of reason, and politicize his subject of reason. Towards the end of this essay, we shall investigate to what extent Foucauldian genealogy can honestly be said to maintain its non-critical relativism, or rather what *kind* of relativism it adopts. But for the time being, this analysis will take the genealogist's relativism at face value. To this end, we will now explore a conception of rationality based on wholly relativist standpoint.

Imagining, as Hook points out, the endless possibility of alternative *showings*, we can assume that some forms of reason emerge through history while others are left behind. In this light, reason can be seen to exist within a network of power: a framework of inclusion and exclusion. The genealogist's task is to form an image of this framework, thereby tracing '*the hazardous play of dominations*'³⁵ at work in the creation of reason, logic and sense. Rather than being characterized as a frozen ideal, situated at the realization of some immanent teleology, reason is instead located in a process of perpetual struggle, bound to its precise historical moment. For Foucault, it would in fact be

³⁵ Foucault, Michel, '*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*' in *From modernism to postmodernism: an anthology*, by Lawrence E. Cahoone, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006, p.245

impossible to imagine the suspension of this struggle, since power relations permeate every level of social existence.

“Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination.”³⁶

How far should we follow this line of thinking? If notions of coherent teleology, immanent rationality and timeless truth evaporate under the genealogist’s gaze, seemingly replaced by a state of perpetual warfare, what is the implication on the subject of reason? Where does the ‘I’ of our uniquely personal experience of the world reside? For Foucault, any historical analysis built on hermeneutic interpretation is insufficient; as the product of endless power relations, all conceptions of inherent rationality or soul instantly fall away. Not only that, even the body is considered in radically anti-essentialist terms. Our corporeal matter is the nexus of warring forces, which bears the stigmata of our lived experience: *“Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.”³⁷* As he elaborates in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Part 1*, both the mind and the body are the surface of permanent historical encounter. The subject is therefore implicated in this historical process psychologically and physically. His very being is envisaged as a permanent construction site.

³⁶ Ibid., p.246

³⁷ Ibid., p.247

On a theoretical level, this argument seems fairly convincing. But Foucault's description of a human subjectivity that proceeds *from domination to domination*³⁸ could appear to suggest that man lives in a state of endless repression. To what extent does this picture resonate with our relationship to our corporeal subjectivity? Do its implications accurately reflect our own experience in 21st Century liberal society? In order to formulate a response, perhaps we need to look deeper at the idea of domination, indeed to examine our understanding of power itself.

In the next section, we shall examine how Foucault tackles the subject of reason within a field of unsuspended power. Furthermore, we shall see how effectively this model of power functions in the service of the genealogical project: as a tool for discursive analysis, as a means of dissecting the rationality of our own present day, and as a way to liberate the subject of reason. We should remind ourselves of Foucault's microphysics of power, as examined in some detail in my previous essay. But first, it might be helpful to begin with a brief overview of the Marxist conception of power, since this will offer a counterpoint for Foucault's revision of power.

³⁸ Ibid., p.246

Biopower and the Foucauldian subject of reason

For Marxists, power is the property of the state. It is used to maintain the dominant rationality of the state's socio-economic hierarchy. As a property, it is located in a privileged position in the social order, and deployed over the social field to extract surplus value from labouring classes below. In theoretical terms, power can therefore be envisaged as an essentially negative, repressive property that operates in a unidirectional sense. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault dissolves this conception of a homogeneous power source, replacing it with an alternative, *microphysical* idea. At its root, this spatial revision invites us to reconsider the direction of power in fragmented terms. Deleuze signals that power operates not in a unidirectional sense, but across a multiplicity of coordinates: *'these relations between forces take place not above but within the very tissue of the assemblages they produce.'*³⁹ (My underlining) It is worth highlighting the language at play here. It points to a kind of power that is neither external to nor repressive of a social order, but operates rather as an internal and productive element within that society. This fragmented model starts to challenge a theory of power that sets up binary arrangements between base / superstructure, or internal social field / external state mechanics. According to this microphysical arrangement, the State is not an external apparatus divorced from social formations; rather it exists within these formations, and is *produced by* a multitude of power relations that operate throughout the fabric of everyday life. To understand how this impacts the core theme of this essay, we might simply review the previous statements, replacing the term 'power' with 'reason. Just as the image of a homogenous power source dissolves under the microphysical explanation, so too does the

³⁹ Gilles Deleuze, 'Foucault: a New Cartographer', p.40

idea that a State manufactures and subsequently administers forms of rationality across a complex social realm. In place of a repressive Marxist State, we encounter one that both produces *and is produced by* a plurality of rationalities. The effective functioning of the State, then, relies on its management and manipulation of divergent rationalities to its own benefit. It assimilates those that are coherent with its political objectives, and excludes those that are not. Foucault suggests that the capitalist state emerged via its dependence on this exclusionary procedure, sustained by a highly calculable, efficient and dependable regime of disciplinary techniques that cumulated in what he labelled *biopower*. As we shall come to see, biopower lodged exclusion deep within the subject of reason.

In his description of disciplinary society, Foucault takes great pains to illustrate the ways in which a society under panoptic surveillance became increasingly productive, monitored by the disciplinary power of a state-wide network of institutions that eliminated the opportunity for disappearance, deviation, imprecision: *'Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?'*⁴⁰

Embedded in a society under permanent visibility, biopower is an insidious form of control, both of a physical kind, and of a more invisible kind within the human subjectivity. Criminology, psychology, medicine - forms of knowledge based on diagnostic, prognostic assessments - are administered by judges of normative behaviour. Doctors, teachers and magistrates become the arbiters of social conduct, equipped to exclude the sane from the insane, the correct from the perverted, the legal from the criminal. As this process grew increasingly effective, so the exclusionary tendency became

⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel, *'Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison'*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon Books, 1977, p.228

naturalized. Sexual, social and professional conduct no longer needed to be regulated by external forces of repression; the subject policed his/her own nature. A historically specific code of reason vanished into human subjectivity. Culture turned into a vast confessional.

For example, in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Foucault goes into great detail to identify an exclusionary tendency at work in Victorian rationality. He confronts the common misconception of the Victorian era as a moment of discursive paucity and repression around the theme of sexuality. Rather, he states, the obsessive *interest* in the topic is manifest in the proliferation of medical and psychiatric documentation that permeated society. Science provided a network of medical, educational and psychoanalytic discourses to distinguish healthy behaviour from deviancy, perversity and irregularity. Here, biopower can be envisaged as a mechanism of control that operates not through repression, but through a kind of exclusionary policy at the level of deep, introspective rationality. The human subject regulates himself in the search for 'truth'. His apparently innate sense of rationality allows him to distinguish healthy behaviour from perverse, or valid life-giving acts from wanton acts of depravity. For Foucault, the internalisation of an externally manufactured, codified method of exclusion transforms society into a kind of permanent confessional:

*"The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, demands only to surface."*⁴¹

⁴¹ Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p.60

This practical example offers a significant departure from the Marxist conception of power as an obscure external force. Regulated by a ubiquitous network of guardians, the standards and values of a capitalist system can be seen to disappear into the accepted social rationality. An entire system of interested, economic values vanishes into the ether of 'common sense'.

This '*disciplinary monotony*' of a confessional society, '*the indefinitely generalizable mechanism of "Panopticism"*'⁴² offers a compelling model to explain the operations of capitalism over a population.⁴³ Rather than a wholesale replacement of the Marxist conception of power in capitalist society, Biopower can be seen as a complication to a model that reduces bodily control to secondary effects of a fundamental class struggle. But to what extent can this description of '*a carceral network of power-knowledge*'⁴⁴ truly be said to offer a practical example of a *positive, productive* conception of power? Does this image of a society regulated by austere institutional discourse allow for the perpetual and reciprocal exchanges of power suggested by his abstract microphysics? Moreover, could this derivation of a general paradigm of social power simply be said to fall into the same unifying, totalising rationality that our genealogist set out to counter?

As many commentators have pointed out, Foucault's positive, productive microphysics of power itself fragments when it encounters the concrete reality of social forms. Somewhat

⁴² Foucault, Michel, '*Panopticism*', in *Readings in the philosophy of technology*, by David M. Kaplan, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p.365

⁴³ There is not space in this essay for a full investigation into the relationship between capitalism and biopower. For this, it may be helpful to refer to Foucault's lectures in '*Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*

⁴⁴ Foucault, Michel, '*The History of Sexuality. Volume 1*', p.305

ironically, works such as *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Part 1* offer the reader a one-sided analysis that describes the emergence of society within a history of unmitigated domination. The first work describes how a dominant state rationality ultimately produces ‘*subjected and practiced bodies, “docile bodies”*’⁴⁵. Meanwhile in the second work, bodies are ‘saturated’ with disciplinary techniques, while sex is ‘*administered*’ by a controlling power that ‘*wrapped the sexual body in its embrace*’⁴⁶. In each case the causal link between state rationality and the emergence of human subjectivity is uncomfortably linear, efficient and uni-directional. As we shall now examine, this has problematic implications when it comes to explain the workings of human subjectivity.

Where, complains Marxist theorist Michel de Certeau, are the accounts of resistance, the counter-discursive tactics, the alternative forms of rationality? Surely, he counters, beneath the ‘*monotheistic*’ apparatuses of the Panopticon, a ‘*polytheism of scattered practices survives*.’⁴⁷ While it should be conceded that Foucault goes to some ends to describe the emergence of alternative discourses⁴⁸, this is highly underdeveloped across his analysis. This could be said to represent an unfortunate, and rather ironic, objectivization of the Foucauldian subject. Two points should be advanced in the poststructuralist’s defence. Firstly, it is possible that this paucity of alternative accounts constitutes a tactical consideration: the very invisibility of counter-discourse might represent a key component of the text’s strategic success. The discursive analyst is, after all, almost entirely powerless

⁴⁵ Foucault, Michel, ‘*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*’, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon Books, 1977, p.138

⁴⁶ Foucault, Michel, ‘*The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*’, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p.44

⁴⁷ McNay, Lois, ‘*Foucault: A Critical Introduction (Key Contemporary Thinkers)*’ Stafford: Polity Press, 1994, p.102

⁴⁸ In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes how ‘homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or “naturalness” be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified’ Foucault, Michel, ‘*The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*’, London: Penguin Books, 1979, p.101

in the possible instrumentations of his / her text. Since he would be unable to control how it might be used by different power interests, a presentation of critical rationalities may easily become a new buttress of hegemonic power. Or, as Derek Hook points out in *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power*,

'if we produce texts as a means of critiquing discourse, that is, if we generate discourse as the basis of opposition, we may very possibly act to provide an oblique support or adjunct to the discourse we are attempting to contest'.⁴⁹

While this is a point worthy of consideration at this stage, the invisibility of counter-discourse goes unacknowledged in Foucauldian accounts of biopower. It might therefore seem to credit the genealogist's project with an unmerited strategic complexity. Secondly, we should recall the objectives of Foucauldian genealogy that were proposed at this essay's starting point. These never set out to articulate every form of alternative rationality, but rather the *analysis of descent* of discursive forms, and the *processes* by which other rationalities became excluded. Therefore, we should concede that a genealogical account which (perhaps ironically) reiterates the exclusion of alternative accounts and purely describes how those the methods of exclusion were set in motion, could be said to remain intact. This would leave de Certeau's attack unwarranted.

But regardless of whether or not the genealogist fulfils his own self-styled objectives, what *effect* does this paucity of resistance incur on our reading of the Foucauldian subject? Let's

⁴⁹ Hook, Dr. Derek, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power (Critical Theory and Practice in Psychology and the Human Sciences)*, London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p127

remind ourselves of the nature of this non-essential subjectivity: mutable, open-ended and entirely the product of his/her historical moment. As Lois McNay posits,

*'the problem with such a conception is that it tends to reduce all forms of psychic inner life to the effects of a unifying bodily discipline. Subjects are understood as arbitrarily constructed and manipulable 'docile bodies', rather than as persons with the capacity for autonomous experience and action.'*⁵⁰

If as contemporary beings we represent little more than unresisting recipients of disciplinary power mechanisms, then we in turn become little more than machines. Any apparently subjective decision-making simply represents a mechanical response to a state-manufactured system of knowledge. We become automata that simply internalise an externally-manufactured rationality. This bleak portrait of the Foucauldian subject receives a barrage of acerbic criticism. The Christopher Norris dubs it *'a place-filler, a recipient of moral directives which issue from some other, heteronomous source of authority, and which cannot be conceived in any way belonging to a project of autonomous self-creation.'*⁵¹ Axel Honneth accuses it of a crude behaviourism *'that represents psychic processes as the result of constant conditioning.'*⁵²

Not only is does this analytic slippage from state discourse as a *tendency* of power to an all-encompassing *monolith* of social control paint a hollow portrait of human subjectivity, coming from the genealogist it is also deeply ironic. The Neo-Marxist Jürgen Habermas points out that Foucault becomes ensnared in his own 'will to truth'. In disassembling

⁵⁰ McNay, Lois, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction (Key Contemporary Thinkers)* Stafford: Polity Press, 1994, p.103

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.104

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.104

truths the genealogist establishes his own, thereby applying the same totalizing tendencies that he seeks to expose. How will the genealogist wrestle free from the negative shadow cast by his analysis of power relations in the modern state? More importantly for this essay, can the Foucauldian subject be reconfigured as an active participant in his historical field of reason? To address these concerns, we shall turn now to one of Foucault's final works, published in 1982. In *The Subject and Power*, we will encounter a surprising reconciliation between a positive conception of power and the Foucauldian subject of reason. Central to this shift is a re-evaluation of the state. But to what extent the genealogist is truly able to abandon his relativist stance in favour of emancipatory urges will remain open for analysis.

Government and the Foucauldian subject of reason

From the late 1970s until his untimely death in 1984, Foucault's genealogical analysis addresses the question of government. As we shall come to examine, this brings him to elaborate a new model of power that is counterposed to a monolithic centralist conception. Foucault identifies the roots of this revised model in the sixteenth century, when a sudden decline in society's belief in a divine right to rule saw a shattering of feudalism; in its place, the modern state emerged. Stripped of any objective transcendent right, the state quickly developed its own principles of immanent rationality. As he points out in his reading of Machiavelli's *The Prince*, once there is '*no fundamental, essential, natural and juridical connection between the prince and his principality*'⁵³, the prime concern of any central power body suddenly becomes the perpetual reinforcement of its own situation within the minds of its population. By extension, the art of government becomes a preoccupation with the rationality of its citizens. In his essay '*The Soul of the Citizen*', Colin Gordon summarises this as follows:

'The art of government in the early modern period is accompanied by a consciously elaborated notion of the inner connectedness of the government of oneself, the conduct of individual existence, on the one hand, and the government of others, the regulation of the lives of many, on the other. The sixteenth century's neo-Stoic interest in a new culture of the self - of self-knowledge, self-mastery, self-formation - becomes (...) a

⁵³ Ibid., p.113

*major constituent of the political pedagogies and techniques of the early modern state.*⁵⁴

It is worth pausing for a moment to study the language at work here. ‘*Self-knowledge, self-mastery, self-formation*’ carry more positive connotations than the repressive conceptions of power studied above. Furthermore, the ‘*government of oneself*’ suggests an image of a self-constituting subject: a truly *responsible* citizen. Yet we already know that biopower functioned most effectively when its disciplinary techniques were internalised within the minds of self-policing subjects. In a lecture in 1977, he signalled that ‘*The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualisation by power.*’⁵⁵ So in what way can the workings of government on the human subjectivity be considered any more positive than the insidious techniques of disciplinary society?

At base, the distinction turns around the quality and effect of power. Biopower might be considered an *objectivising* force; subjects were normalised, codified and transformed into ‘*docile bodies*’ by a regime of state-governed discourse. This left a starved image of a passive, lifeless human subject,⁵⁶ *objectivised* by the state and, somewhat ironically, by the genealogist himself. In its place, Foucault delineates a new model: pastoral power. This centres around “*the way a human being turns himself - or herself - into a subject*”⁵⁷, and casts the human subject in an active, *subjectivising* role. To understand this reconceived

⁵⁴ Gordon, C., ‘*The Soul and the citizen: Max Weber and Michel Foucault on rationality and government*’ in Whimser, S. and Lash, S. (eds) *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1987, p.85

⁵⁵ Quoted in McNay, Lois, ‘*Foucault: A Critical Introduction (Key Contemporary Thinkers)*’ Stafford: Polity Press, 1994, p.122

⁵⁶ It also operated as a *material* force on the body (footnote “*power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject’s own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn’t through its having first to be interiorised in people’s consciousness*”).

⁵⁷ Foucault, Michel, “*The Subject and Power*” in Hubert Dreyfus and P. Rabinow “*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*”, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982, p.208

notion of pastoral power, we need briefly to turn to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, where the idea of pastorship first appears.

Early Hebrew culture describes how a leader relates to his subjects much as a shepherd to his flock: his role is to bring about their salvation through ‘*constant, individualised and final kindness*.’⁵⁸ In turn, the flock’s relationship to the shepherd is not one of obedience, but rather of dependence. In the same way, individual salvation depends not on coercion but on a personal choice: an active submission to the shepherd. In turn, this submission is rewarded in the afterlife: heaven. Foucault adapted the notion of pastoral power from a spiritual reading towards a secular one; the *afterlife* is replaced with *this* life. No longer do individuals struggle to attain salvation in the *next* world, but rather in *this* world. In practical terms, a heavenly reward is replaced with security, health, well-being and wealth. Here, we can start to understand a model of power based not solely on a principle of domination, but on active participation. Violence can be replaced by the outward appearance of peace. Disciplinary rationality does not reduce individuals to docile bodies; it invites them to create themselves in its image. The self-constituting subject is equipped with rational powers: he can take action. He can either conform to - or resist - governing powers. He is a free agent - or rather, he believes that he is. For, so long as the citizen complies with a dominant governmental rationality, his happiness is augmented. These ideas can usefully inform our understanding of Foucault’s neologism *governmentality*; a term we can break down to mean ‘the mentality of government’.

⁵⁸ Carrette, Jeremy R, ‘*Foucault and religion : spiritual corporality and political spirituality*’ London: Routledge, 1999, p.138

For Foucault, government - the power of the modern state - lies in the manipulation of consciousness, or as he deftly puts it, in the '*conduct of conduct*'.⁵⁹ Amidst a vastly complex social field (too complex for any state to control through domination) this non-material form of power is highly effective. After all, the more a population confirms the state's economic aims through its own subjective desires, the less the state needs to enforce those ends. They simply disappear into the internal passageways of common sense:

*'this form of power cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it.'*⁶⁰

Thus, in place of a central monolithic power source, the medical, educational and legal fields are deployed to act as '*a block of capacity-communication-power*': a communicative system that structures a complex fabric of knowledge-power relations. Is this truly a divergence from a statist conception of power? This description still appears to cede considerable medical, educational and legal discourse; the instruments of a capitalist state. To answer this question, we will turn to what many critics have labelled the strongly *Weberian* strands evident in Foucault's conception of government, or power operating through reason.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Foucault, Michel, "*The Subject and Power*" in Hubert Dreyfus and P. Rabinow "*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*", Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982, p.220

⁶⁰ McNay, Lois, '*Foucault: A Critical Introduction (Key Contemporary Thinkers)*' Stafford: Polity Press, 1994, p.123

⁶¹ (Barry Smart 1985 pp138-9, Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982 p.166)

Weber, a late nineteenth-century social theorist, examined the grip of capitalist rationality over the individual's conception of self. Dreyfus and Rabinow indicate Foucault's inherited *'concern with rationalisation and objectification as the essential trend of our culture and the most important problem of our time.'*⁶² Colin Gordon examines how pastoral power turns *'individuality into an enterprise (and) the person as an entrepreneur of the self.'*⁶³ However, Carlo Ginzburg extends this comparison with Weber to a condemnatory critique, accusing the genealogist of simply devising a new totalising vision. He claims that Foucault's notion of government reduces everything to *'one and the same meta-anthropological and metahistorical process of rationalisation.'*⁶⁴ In other words, Ginzburg rejects pastoral power on the basis that it still proposes a human subject as simply the expression of a positivist capitalist rationality. But this critique overlooks the genealogist's endemic dismissal of any positivist idea of rationality. For Foucault, reason does not constitute some general, inexorable process towards a singular, knowable end. Rather, it is characterised by difference, incoherence, plurality. In other words, within the wider social field, reason exists just as it does in the internal human subjectivity. There is no single concept of reason: it operates within a constantly shifting plurality of practices:

'I don't believe one can talk in this way of 'rationalisation' as something given, without on the one hand postulating an absolute value inherent in reason, and on the other taking the risk of applying the term empirically in a completely arbitrary way. I

⁶² Gordon, C, *'The Soul and the citizen: Max Weber and Michel Foucault on rationality and government'* in Whimser, S. and Lash, S. (eds) *Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1987, p.427

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.433

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.427

*think one must confine one's use of this word to an instrumental and relative meaning.*⁶⁵

This is not, however, to say Foucault's world is indeterminate, without form or constraint. Rather, we might imagine a range of delimited actions that make sense in a certain conception of a specific socio-historic present. It is a kind of normative framework that orders the way we act, and gives those actions meanings. It might be helpful to explain this idea in theoretical terms. Reason *must* be a shifting, unstable network - a plurality of rationalities - that is characterised by relativity. For if it were not, how would new forms of reason ever come into being? Foucault summarises this problem as follows:

*'If individuals simply reproduced existing cultural forms in their activities, if they were simply whatever their culture directed them to be, culture would fall into closed, sterile self-repetition. And this is ultimately an untenable account, because it makes it impossible to understand how such all-embracing cultural forms could ever have emerged in the first place.'*⁶⁶

Thus Foucault explains the movement of culture through *agonism*: a dynamic relationship between power and freedom, incitation and struggle. It is through agonism that we transgress the boundaries placed on us, and resist the limits that constrain us. We perpetually reconfigure established modes of rationality, finding new alternative ways to communicate our own 'otherness' and 'difference'. This transgressive encounter smacks

⁶⁵ M. Foucault, 'Questions of method' in G. Burchell (ed.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 1991, p.79

⁶⁶ Falzon, Christopher, *Foucault and Social Dialogue: Beyond Fragmentation*, London: Routledge, 1998, p.40

of the discordant model of thought proposed by Deleuze earlier in this essay. We might remind ourselves that for Deleuze, true thought – *a thought without Image* – can be attained only via a destruction of recognition, a dismemberment of the deadening terminus that is rationalisation. Embedded in Foucault’s agonism is the acknowledgement of an ultimate failure to rationalize a world that is endlessly evasive, permanently unknowable. The formation of rational thought in the human subject will always be temporary, artificial, constructed.

Christopher Falzon elaborates this conception of *agonism* via his explanation of ‘dialogue’; an open-ended social process where human beings interpret, shape and order one another according to their own imposed frameworks of sense. He points out that freedom is critical to this movement: if one party silences the other through an act of domination, social life plummets into a state of ossified self-enclosure. As Falzon explains,

“It is only because individuals can transgress the forms imposed on them by others and enter into a dialogue with their culture that it is possible for particular cultural forms to emerge and for there to be historical change.”⁶⁷

Foucault’s agonistic proposal - resistance as the transgression of limits – helps us to explain how new reason can emerge. By extension, it offers us a mechanism to change our own culture. Thus, in *Subject and Power* we are presented with a challenge: to recognize who we are in this historical moment, to understand the inventedness of our

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.41

world, how our subjecthood is created – and to transgress these limits. As subjects of reason, our task is not to *discover* what we are, but continually to *resist* what we are.

This model carries with it an unmistakably ethical tone. Indeed to some extent it might be read as the genealogist's call-to-action. As free individuals, it is our duty to become *historians of the present*, to visualise ourselves as self-constituting subjects, to disassemble the idea of an essence, and to create ourselves through acts of perpetual resistance.

Through resistance, we can transgress socially-imposed limits, transform the ways in which we might think, act, and be. This has a wider social impact, since by implication, we also change the parameters for those around us. For Graham Birchell, it is here that *'Foucault's work provides us with a number of splendid examples of "ways out" in relation to certain features of our goldfish bowl.'*⁶⁸ However, for Peter Dews the implications are not so positive: this ethical content represents a critical paradox in the genealogist's activity. We shall dissect this critique below.

⁶⁸ Burchell, Graham, *Liberal Government and techniques of the self*, published in Economy and Society, August 1993 edition, London: Routledge, 1993, p.30

The problem of ethics

First, if the self-constituting subject of reason is supposed to move through history without essence or foundational basis, then it must represent a kind of ethical vacuum, simply the locus of '*games of truth*'. While Dews may find this proposition untenable in itself, he moves further, providing evidence that the genealogist is himself unable to sustain this anti-ethical stance in his own texts, lending his supposed relativism a profoundly emancipatory function. He quotes the postmodernist in one of his final interviews, who claims that his role is

*'to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment in history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticised and destroyed.'*⁶⁹

Having endowed his autonomous subject of reason with an ethical choice - to accept or deny his own freedom, to criticise and destroy accepted truths - it seems impossible to conceive of it in non-ethical terms. As Dews points out, Foucault appears to have set up an ethical dimension to existence, an idea of '*true or false self-relation*'⁷⁰ that is equivalent to a Marxist notion of true or false consciousness. Dews goes on to conclude that

⁶⁹ Dreyfus, Hubert, '*Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault*', published in International Journal of Philosophical Studies, Volume 4, Issue 1, London: Routledge, 1996, p.10

⁷⁰ Dews, Peter, '*The Return of the Subject in the Late Foucault*', p.155

*'at the end of his life, Foucault could no longer avoid the fact that the understanding of social and historical processes is, if not a component of our self-understanding, at the very least a contribution to our liberation from self-misunderstanding.'*⁷¹

This reflection from Dews raises two questions. First, does this ethical content represent the undoing of Foucault's postmodernist relativism? Perhaps not. For it would be wrong to posit genealogy as an outright challenge to *all* social forms, values and principles. We should remember that the genealogist's role is to *problematise* the process whereby truths and values are brought into being. Furthermore, it would be inhuman to imagine the genealogist as having *no* values, no perspective and no ethical standpoint. Rather than existing in an ethical vacuum, we might consider this figure in less nihilistic terms. His less-destructive, more productive function is to bring about a new experience in relation to commonly-held assumptions, by disturbing existing modes of thought and action, resisting closure by domination, and allowing new players to enter the field of reason and challenge the rules. We might therefore propose that if the genealogical project is driven by an ethical dimension, it might therefore be described as the *ethics of democracy*.

But even so, does this democratic urge suggest the inauthenticity of what Habermas calls Foucault's anti-modern, anti-enlightenment stance?⁷² Or rather, would such a label provide an accurate description of Foucault's position? To answer this question, we will turn to two essays, written two centuries apart, by two authors. These two essays share the same title: *'What is Enlightenment?'* The first is by the humanist Kant, the second by

⁷¹ Ibid., p.156

⁷² see p.29 Habermas, Jürgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment" originally published in *New German Critique*, no. 22, London: Duke University Press, 1982

the anti-humanist Foucault. In what space remains, some analysis of these two works is warranted since, as we shall come to see they suggest a surprising rapprochement between Foucault and humanist Enlightenment, and a suggestion that instead of being diametrically opposed to it, perhaps there is scope to envisage the genealogist's self-constituting subject as a useful corrective to the modernist project.

In *What is Enlightenment*, Kant momentarily turns his focus from the universal and ahistorical towards the precise historical moment within which he finds himself. Foucault summarises this move as follows:

*'When in 1784 Kant asked, Was heißt Aufklärung? (What is Enlightenment) he meant, What's going on just now? What's happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise moment in which we are living?'*⁷³

For Foucault, this is a deeply significant moment in modern philosophy. For, according to his reading of this text, Kant presents us with a conception of the Enlightenment founded not on totalising ideals, but rather on one *'that asks to what extent what is presented to us as essential, fixed and obligatory is in fact historically emergent and specific.'*⁷⁴ Thus, Foucault contends, it is one of the Enlightenment's key players - Kant himself - who lays the foundations for a historically-grounded philosophy.

⁷³ Foucault, Michel, "The Subject and Power" in Hubert Dreyfus and P. Rabinow *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982, p.785

⁷⁴ Falzon, Christopher, *Foucault and Social Dialogue: Beyond Fragmentation*, London: Routledge, 1998, p.76

“He is not seeking to understand the present on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement. He is looking for a difference: What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?”⁷⁵

In this way, Kant himself ‘marks the discreet entrance into the history of thought’⁷⁶. It is a humanist who opens the door to a new way of thinking: a historical self-awareness. This is subsequently adopted by Hegel and then Marx; each examines how categories of rationality emerge among economic and social arrangements that are wholly contingent on their time. Under this analysis, Humanism can be said to operate within a historical dimension, with the human subjectivity occupying his / her moment in history. If this is the case, then what is the quarrel between the humanist and post-structuralist subject of reason? What is the point of this essay?

According to Christopher Falzon, this historical move illustrates a tendency that reappears throughout humanist thought. While Kant, Hegel and Marx each advance towards a historico-philosophical standpoint, each ultimately turns his back on history. Each one of these humanist thinkers calls into question the previous philosopher’s totalising scheme; Hegel uses history to question Kant’s metaphysical subject, Marx turns to historical specificity to criticize Hegel’s abstract subject⁷⁷. Yet, just as they appear the

⁷⁵ Foucault, Michel *“What is Enlightenment ?”* (*“Qu’est-ce que les Lumières ?”*), in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Rabinow (P.), New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p.32

⁷⁶ Ibid., p33

⁷⁷ Falzon offers a detailed analysis of this humanist tendency, in *‘Foucault and Social Dialogue: Beyond Fragmentation’*, p.75

point of engaging in a each of them balks, falling back on the essential foundations of a metaphysical subject.⁷⁸ For Falzon, it is easy to see why:

*'By its very nature the humanist vision, the raising of man to the status of a god, with Enlightenment as the transformation and reorganisation of social practices in accordance with an essential human nature, has to deny human historicity, our susceptibility to historical forces, our finitude.'*⁷⁹

For, without a foundational essence, the human subject is left dangerously exposed to the potentially flawed reason of its historical moment. It might seem that nothing would stop us from lapsing into pure irrationalism.

But to what extent is this fear justified? We should remind ourselves that the non-essential, self-constituting Foucauldian subject does not represent the diametric opposite to the humanist subject, an embracer of pure irrationalism. By the same token, an analysis of the history of reason does not imply the nihilistic *destruction* of reason. Rather, it demonstrates how other kinds of reason can exist, and opens the field for *other* subjects of reason to emerge. This, states Foucault, is one of the Enlightenment project's prime objectives. In his text, *What is Enlightenment* he suggests that

"the thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is not faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude - that is, of a

⁷⁸ Marx's historical radicalism, for example, is undermined by the repeated renewals of an essential subjectivism. See especially his 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844'.

⁷⁹ Foucault and Social Dialogue: *Beyond Fragmentation*, p.76

*philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era.*⁸⁰

Thus, in a surprising move at the end of his life, the genealogist aligns his project to the Enlightenment tradition. This is not a conception of Enlightenment defined by timeless ideals of human nature, rather by one that is understood as a critique of dogma, frozen thought, and characterized by a line of questioning that reflects on our present form of life. Stepping hazardously off the relativist podium, Foucault serves as a useful figure within the ethical battlefield. He proposes a form of postmodernism that is not crudely anti-modernism, anti-Enlightenment, but rather a fruitful challenge to modernism's progressive values. For by releasing it from the grip of truth, Foucault's empowered subject of reason is invited to mobilize his own empirical knowledge towards the transformation of his society. Foucault renews reason as an instrument of emancipation. But rather than constituting a static ideal, this emancipation is ongoing project.

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel "What is Enlightenment?" ("Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?"), in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Rabinow (P.), New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p.42-3

(In)Conclusion

This essay has not assumed an impartial standpoint. Indeed, no essay could truthfully claim to do so. For, the act of selecting authors, assembling quotes and structuring paragraphs implicates the essayist in a process of inclusion and exclusion. A genealogical analysis of this very essay would identify multiple acts of domination and exclusion, the silencing of inconvenient modes of rationality. How then are we to move forward? Does a reflexive acknowledgement of this inevitable procedure exonerate it from the remonstrations of the genealogist? Furthermore, can this analysis honestly be said to have arrived at any conclusive evidence, or simply to have constructed a verbal framework out of pre-existing forms of reason?

If we can broadly posit that the objective of academic study is to formalize stray pathways of thought into coherent modes of rationality, then a correct academic paper should conclude with a tying-up of theoretical knots. But would a conclusive response to our initial line of inquiry truly represent an appropriate ending for this essay? With any luck, the arguments presented above will have pointed out some of the problems that arise with the closure of any rational model. Foucauldian genealogy has taught us that there will always be other ways of thinking, other problems: any crystallization of thought can only take place in a circumstance of artificially-censured thought. An essay that deals with these questions ought therefore to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of its own activity.

With this in mind, rather than drawing this analysis of Foucault's subject of reason towards a tidy conclusion, it seems more appropriate to leave the question hanging

dangerously open. We will summarise some of our findings, before ending with a dilemma that goes untreated in Foucault's project.

In this essay, the humanist subject of reason has been presented as a profoundly incapacitated figure. Fixed in an immutable field of reason, he has appeared both dependent on and unable to attain his essential metaphysical truth. Even were he to glimpse such a transcendental knowledge, language would render him ill-equipped faithfully to report it. His Foucauldian counterpart, however, moving fluidly through a historical field of reason, has wavered between normalisation and self-constitution, ultimately veering towards a more promising transgressive character. This subject is empowered: he is a historical *act* rather than an essential *substance*, a self-constructing subjectivity that exists in a reflexive medium without metaphysical foundation, immanent teleology, or starting point. But in the name of genealogy, perhaps we should remember that alternative voices always exist. For according to Peter Dews, its lack of foundation contaminates Foucault's self-constituting subject with a rather inconvenient dilemma: '*The obvious paradox of a reflexive account of self-construction is that the self must already exist in order to construct itself.*'⁸¹ If the Foucauldian subject of reason has no starting point, how can self-constitution ever begin?

⁸¹ Dews, Peter, '*The Return of the Subject in the Late Foucault*', p.155

Bibliography

- Althusser, L. 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses: Notes toward an investigation', in 'Media and cultural studies: keywords', edited by Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Douglas Kellner, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006
- Horkheimer, Max; Adorno, Theodor W., Noerr, Gunzelin, Schmid, 'Dialectic of enlightenment: philosophical fragments', Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002
- Bernstein, Richard J., 'Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis', Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983
- Brook, Andrew, 'Kant and the Mind', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997
- Burchell, Graham. (ed.), 'The Foucault effect: Studies in Governmentality', Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991
- Carrette, Jeremy R, 'Foucault and religion : spiritual corporality and political spirituality' London: Routledge, 1999
- Cahoone, Lawrence E., 'From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology', Blackwell Philosophy Anthologies, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995
- Critchley, Simon; Schroeder, William Ralph, 'A companion to continental philosophy', Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999
- Deleuze, Gilles, 'Difference and Repetition', Paris: Presse Universitaires de France , 1968
- Deleuze, Gilles, 'A New Cartographer (The Archaeology of Knowledge)', 1988, in Barry Smart (ed.) Michel Foucault: critical assessments, Volume 3, London: Routledge , 1994
- Dews, Peter, 'The Return of the Subject in the Late Foucault' , London: Radical Philosophy, 1989
- Dreyfus, Hubert, 'Being and Power: Heidegger and Foucault', published in International Journal of Philosophical Studies, Volume 4, Issue 1, London: Routledge, 1996, p.10
- Eagleton, Terry, 'Ideology: An Introduction', London: Verso, 1991
- Fairclough, Norman, 'Language and Power'. London: Longman, 1989
- Falzon, Christopher, 'Foucault and Social Dialogue: Beyond Fragmentation', London: Routledge, 1998
- Foucault, Michel, 'Panopticism', in 'Readings in the philosophy of technology', by David M. Kaplan, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004

- Foucault, Michel, '*The Order of Discourse*', Paris: Gallimard, 1971
- Foucault, Michel, '*The Archaeology of Knowledge*', London: Routledge, 1972
- Foucault, Michel, '*Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*' in From modernism to postmodernism: an anthology, by Lawrence E. Cahoon, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006
- Foucault, Michel, '*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*', trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon Books, 1977
- Foucault, Michel, '*The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: The Will to Knowledge*', London: Penguin Books, 1979
- Foucault, Michel '*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*', edited by Colin Gordon, Harvester: London, 1980
- Foucault, Michel, '*Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of "Political Reason"*', in Sterling M. McMurrin (ed.) The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Vol.2, Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1981
- Foucault, Michel, '*The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*', New York: Pantheon Books, 1982
- Foucault, Michel, "*The Subject and Power*" in Hubert Dreyfus and P. Rabinow "Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics", Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982
- Foucault, Michel, '*The History of Sexuality. Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*', London: Penguin Books, 1984
- Foucault, Michel "*What is Enlightenment ?*" ("*Qu'est-ce que les Lumières ?*"), in *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Rabinow (P.), New York: Pantheon Books, 1984
- Foucault, Michel '*The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982*', New York: Picador, 1987
- Foucault, Michel, *Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault*, in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (eds.), Technologies of the Self, Amherst: University of Massachusetts. Press, 1988
- Foucault, Michel, '*Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 1)*', edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: The New Press, 1997
- Gordon, C, '*The Soul and the citizen: Max Weber and Michel Foucault on rationality and government*' in Whimser, S. and Lash, S. (eds) Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity, London: Allen and Unwin, 1987

Habermas, Jürgen, '*Modernity versus Postmodernity*', translated by Seyla Ben-Habib, in V Taylor & C Winquist; originally published in New German Critique, no. 22, London: Duke University Press, 1981

Habermas, Jürgen, "*The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment*" originally published in New German Critique, no. 22, London: Duke University Press, 1982

Hook, Dr. Derek, '*Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power (Critical Theory and Practice in Psychology and the Human Sciences)*', London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007

Kant, Immanuel, '*Critique of Judgement*', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978

Kant, Immanuel, '*An answer to the question: What is Enlightenment?*' published in 'Immanuel Kant. Practical Philosophy', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor, 1996

McNay, Lois, '*Foucault: A Critical Introduction (Key Contemporary Thinkers)*' Stafford: Polity Press, 1994

Nietzsche, Friedrich, '*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*', New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1998

Plato, '*The Complete Works of Plato, Volume II*', New York: Archeion Press, 2009

Plato, '*Phaedo*', tr. Benjamin Jowett, Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org

Sherratt, Yvonne, '*Adorno's Positive Dialectic*', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002

Williams, James, '*Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide*', Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003