CARE FOR THYSELF? AN HEGELIAN CRITIQUE OF THE FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECT

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ABSTRACT: In the wake of Foucault's reproach of all political projects "global and radical", Foucault resuscitates the Stoic concept of *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self), suggesting self-transformation—"making one's life a work of art"—to be a potent antidote to domination. By making one's life a work of art, which entails disengagement from all things that turn one away from oneself, one can circumvent domination, as well as reduce one's own inclinations to dominate others. Foucault justifies this by claiming that self-relation is ontologically prior to other-relatedness and thus, ethically prior; however, he neglects to delineate how he derives this assumption, making it little more than an arbitrarily posited axiom. I argue that it is upon this assumption that the legitimacy of Foucault's final era hinges, and hence its tenability warrants investigation. In this paper, I use Hegel's immanent ontology systematized in the *Science of Logic*. I dispute Foucault's claim regarding self-relation's primacy by demonstrating how self-relation immanently emerges in the passage through an other and I outline the ramifications of holding fast to an unsustainable categorical assumption.

KEYWORDS: Hegel; Foucault; Subjectivity; Relationality; Self-care; Ontology

INTRODUCTION

Foucault's final era—the inception of which is marked by his 1977-78 College de France course *Security, Territory, Population,* wherein the concept of governmentality begins featuring centrally—can be characterized by two general features: first, a shift away from genealogical analyses of subjectivity produced solely within and by regimes of domination, of which his earlier works such as *Discipline and Punish* are emblematic. Second, there is a shift toward an emphasis on the active role played by individuals vis-à-vis the formation of their subjectivity, the foundation of which Foucault locates in the Stoic concept of *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self),

first appearing in Platonism and reaching its apotheosis in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Foucault suggests that care of the self (henceforth self-care), which entails mastering and inventing oneself as an "art of living", is the primary vehicle by which to conduct the search for freedom from (post)modern regimes of power and domination. Foucault argues that such freedom can only be realized by prioritizing one's relation to oneself, based on his assumption that self-relation is ontologically prior to other-relatedness.

Though it likely need not be repeated to anyone even tangentially affiliated with his project, Foucault disputes the desirability of "definitive knowledge", opting instead for historicism.[1] Notwithstanding, in order for his claims to have import, he tacitly relies on several definitive assumptions, such as the aforementioned one about self-relation's priority, externally imported into his historical inquiries, which ultimately determine his conclusions in advance; however, he neglects to demonstrate the legitimacy of these assumptions. Despite his necessary reliance on these claims, Foucault forecloses on the possibility of a presuppositionless, self-critical derivation of the ontological structures on which any assumption about the primacy of self-relation might be based, the quintessential philosopher of which being none other than Hegel. Of course, such a project is not Foucault's aim— to make such a derivation an overt component of his oeuvre would betray the spirit by which he is otherwise motivated; however, a reliance at least on the determinacies developed in such a systematic project would behoove him, particularly given that he constructs ethico-political prescriptions based upon them and hopes for their desired outcomes to materialize as intended.

The task of the present paper is to not to draw out the ethico-political implications of his prescriptions which might follow from being founded upon un-self-critically solicited assumptions, but rather to investigate what Hegel can clarify regarding the legitimacy of Foucault's ontological assumption itself, on which his rehabilitation of self-care hinges. To do so, it is Hegel's systematic ontology—the *Science of Logic*—which we require. Notably, it is not my intention to engage with Foucault's reading of Hegel, which caricaturizes him as a philosopher of identity, teleology, and totality, guilty of reducing everything to a

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[1] Michel Foucault. "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 32-50, p.47.

formal "skeleton" that masks the "open and hazardous reality of conflicts".[2] As has been aptly demonstrated by contemporary thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek[3] and Catherine Malabou[4], both of whom are respectful of Foucault's project, Hegel's system—which allows the nature of concepts to reveal themselves on their own terms without the aid of a transcendent operator guiding the dialectic—in fact exemplifies a radical commitment to immanence, freedom, and self-determination, making it an appropriate resource for the investigation at hand. To conduct the latter, I use the determinacies of identity, difference, and contradiction in the *Logic*'s Doctrine of Essence and ultimately demonstrate the logical exclusions on which Foucault must rely for his claims to hold sway, highlighting the specifically categorical crisis at the heart of his final era. I do not aim to simply negate Foucault's claim and position Hegel over against him, but rather to discern the claim's conceptual deficiencies and highlight how Foucault compromises his own commitments by not taking them to the end.

FOUCAULT'S FINAL ERA

In 1980, Foucault concedes that he has hitherto focused too heavily on techniques of domination (i.e. normalization, classification, and regulation, as well as more readily evident forms of disciplinary power such as imprisonment and institutionalization) vis-à-vis subject-formation and that "if one wants to analyze the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account … *the interaction between* … techniques of domination and techniques of the self".[5] In other words, one must analyze not only how individuals are determined by existing modes of power and historical phenomena, but how they actively construct themselves within such complexes and consequently modify the latter in so doing. Foucault defines techniques of the self as

> … techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain

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[2] Michel Foucault. "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 51-75. pp.56-57.

[3] Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, (Brooklyn/London: Verso, 2012).

[4] Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic.* Translated by Lisabeth During (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[5] Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth" in *Political Theory* 2, no.2 (1993): 198-227. p.203, emphasis mine.

> number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on.[6]

He deems that to each apparatus of power corresponds a particular set of techniques of the self which, when applied, render individuals governable by such apparatuses. A contemporary example would be the imperative to vote, a right that individuals freely exercise but in so doing, much like the way Althusserian interpellation functions, constitute themselves as subjects of that very system. As Foucault sees it, the point where techniques of the self and techniques of domination intersect, wherein how "individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we can call … government".[7] It is how mechanisms of power and individual reflexive activity intersect that determines the degree of domination to which individuals are subject. Because macro apparatuses require individuals to constitute themselves in a certain way for their operations of power to be efficacious, individuals must possess enough agency to potentially constitute themselves in ways *other* than those prescribed to them. Put simply, despite that individuals often uncritically practice the techniques of the self prescribed by these apparatuses, it is possible that they might choose to abstain or apply them in an unconventional way. Hence, while Foucault's earlier works are often criticized for being resolutely deterministic, he now makes clear that "if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere".[8] There are power relations (which he holds to be agonistic, rather than antagonistic) only *because* individuals are free. Hence, these relations are contingent and therefore malleable.

While Foucault's emphasis in this final period shifts, his motivating impulse remains continuous with what precedes: combatting states of domination. Despite his change in emphasis, which comes with the acknowledgement of freedom and power's co-extensivity rather than mutual exclusion, he still holds fast to his

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Michel Foucault. "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom. Interview by H. Becker, R. Fornet-Betancourt, and A. Gomez-Müller," in *Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997a), 281-301. p.292.

conviction that modern subjects exist within states of domination. Foucault defines the latter as states "in which the power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen", arising when "an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement".[9] Power relations, for Foucault, are inexorable and do not necessarily constitute a problem in themselves—it is their ossification into states of domination he problematizes, desiring instead "as little domination as possible".[10]

Foucault rejects the rather repetitive clarion calls for liberation and instead privileges "practices of freedom" which can be exercised in almost any social formation insofar as they only involve the relation of oneself to oneself and a critical distance from that which is not the self. Liberation simply "paves the way for new power relationships, which must [then] be controlled by practices of freedom", the latter of which Foucault equates with individual ethical conduct.[11] Foucault rejects Wilhelm Reich's quasi-Freudian model which contends that the task ought to be to remove prohibitions, internalizations, and repressions that have eclipsed individuals' singularity. Such a model assumes the facticity of subjective interiority which Foucault decisively jettisons. The self, for Foucault, rather than being a positive foundation, "is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history" applied, again, by both external forces and by individuals on themselves.[12] The task will thus be to "change those technologies" through a process of self-prioritization and experimentation vis-à-vis the limits that have been imposed upon us, so as to reduce the domination to which individuals are subject.[13]

Before continuing, one should note the tension here, particularly in contrast with the previous paragraph's argument which suggests that individuals must possess enough agency to behave in a way contra what is prescribed. On the one hand, if the self is but a historical correlation, it cannot be located outside of socio-historical phenomena, making it externally determined through and through,

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[9] Ibid., p.283.

[10] Ibid., p.298.

[11] Ibid., pp.283-4.

[12] Foucault, *Two Lectures at Dartmouth*, p.222.

[13] Ibid.

including its desire to be other than what it is. This is the view put forth by Bernauer and Mahon, for whom Foucauldian self-formation is "a struggle for freedom within the confines of a historical situation". They claim that Foucault's enterprise "deprives the self of the illusion that it can separate itself from the world".[14] This position, however, disavows what we find on the other hand, which one must acknowledge to understand the radical break Foucault enacts between his final era and his earlier works: if it is possible that individuals have enough agency to do other than what is prescribed to them, even if this choice of something different is not transcendent to the world in which they live, they must be endowed with a degree of interiority which resides outside the process of external determination.[15] Foucault wavers between these competing arguments. I claim that as much as he patently rejects interiority and Cartesian subjectivity, he must ultimately preserve them for the "art of living" he valorizes to be formally possible.

Foucault wagers, within this framework, that the foremost strategy for reducing domination is "to promote new forms of subjectivity through refusal of [the] kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries".[16] He expresses aversion to macropolitical movements and revolutionary transformations, which lead only to different modes of domination rather than to their wholesale reduction, looking instead to libertarian and anarchistic individual-centric alternatives. Foucault famously insists that "there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself", as one's relationship to oneself determines the degree to which socio-political apparatuses can wield power.[17] What then could be provisionally surmised from this—and whether or not this is Foucault's actual position or not is disputable—is that it becomes the individual's task to escape socio-political domination, since the self is considered the most potent locus for change. This,

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[14] James W. Bernauer & Michael Mahon, "Michel Foucault's Ethical Imagination" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Second Edition*, ed. Gary Gutting, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005), 149-175. p.162.

[15] Proponents of this view include Thomas McCarthy, *Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Thoery* (Cambridge: MIT, 1991); Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

[16] Michel Foucault, "Subject and Power" in *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-795. p.785.

[17] Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the College De France, 1981-1982*. Translated by Graham Burchell, ed. Frederic Gros. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). p.252.

again, implies that there must be part of the self residing outside the relations of power that are said to constitute it, thereby reinforcing the concealed existence of a *cogito*-like form with which various context-specific modes of being and acting can be built and performed, and conversely, dissolved and developed anew.

Since reducing domination is the primary aim, or rather for each individual to "escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct *himself*" (a self which is not synonymous with the universal) but must be accomplished in a way that is subtracted from the State's universalist legal structure, new forms of subjectivity must be thoroughly *ethical*.[18] Freedom, according to Foucault, "is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection".[19] In other words, when it is self-conscious (here is also a clue as to why it will be the two-tiered Logic of Essence in the *Science of Logic* which I solicit later). Foucauldian ethics imply "the relationship you have to yourself when you act".[20] Foucault's conception of ethics is not defined by impersonal universal codes, but one in which such codes are relatively insignificant "at least compared with what is required of the individual in the relationship which he has to himself".[21] As opposed to codes which infringe upon individual freedom and require self-renunciation, it is self-styled moral individuality that Foucault prefers. Foucault acknowledges on multiple accounts that most normative theories prescribe the subordination of self-interest to universal moral principles, but he wants to foreground the individual in an anti-normative way and still preserve the very category of ethics.

FOUCAULT AND THE STOICS: CARE OF THE SELF

In modernity, according to Foucault, individuals are constituted as obedient juridico-economic persons, a key feature of which is that they are obligated to

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[18] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France 1977-78.* Translated by Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). pp.194-5, italics mine.

[19] Foucault, *The Ethics of the Concern of the Self*, p.284.

[20] Michel Foucault, "An Interview by Stephen Riggins," in *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997b), 121-134. p.131.

[21] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: History of Sexuality Volume II.* Translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Press, 1990). p.29.

"produce and publish the truth about [themselves]".[22] For Foucault, this fares as the modern incarnation of the Delphic injunction *gnothi seauton* (know thyself) and tends to be associated with Christian confession and self-renunciation, as well as the problematization of desire. Producing oneself as a subject of truth requires the use of normative discourses and their associated techniques of the self, such as self-interpretation. By using these discourses to measure and construct a truth about themselves, individuals invite their own subjugation while simultaneously buttressing apparatuses of domination simply by participating in them.

Foucault proclaims that "the justificatory framework, ground, and foundation" for *gnothi seauton* is actually a spiritual maxim prominent in Ancient Greece through Greco-Roman Antiquity, up until the "Cartesian moment": *epimeleia heautou* (care for the self).[23] Until Descartes, Foucault argues, the epistemological maxim to know thyself is lodged within the field of spirituality—the latter being "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth", or rather, "cares for himself"—wherein self-knowledge is just one of numerous modes of self-care and is complemented by other modes, such as dietetics and meditation.[24] From the Cartesian moment onward, much to Foucault's chagrin, *epimeleia heautou* is discredited and largely purged from the record of the history of Western philosophy.

Foucault defines the "Cartesian moment" as the juncture at which "the philosopher (or the scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject".[25] By obscuring the spiritual element—which fosters the development of diverse but ethical subjectivities not based on any pre-defined normative criteria—involved in subject-production prior to the Cartesian moment, the prototypical subject of (social-)scientific discourse—the abstract "man"—becomes the norm, resultantly delegitimizing alternative forms of subjectivity and their associated ways of living. It is by

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[22] Foucault, *Two Lectures at Dartmouth*, p.204.

[23] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.8.

[24] Ibid., p.15.

[25] Ibid., p.17.

reigniting the emphasis on spirituality that we might overcome the domination constitutive of modern life, again, by becoming other than what we are.[26]

Foucault locates the first appearance of *epimeleia heautou* in Plato's *Alcibiades* and sees it come to its Platonic apotheosis in the *Apology,* wherein Socrates preaches not to care for anything more "than for the perfection of your souls".[27] However, Foucault ultimately deposes Plato's conception, arguing that *epimeleia heautou* is inextricably linked to the will to dominate others in Platonism. On the contrary, Foucault favours the Stoic conception of *epimeleia heautou* emerging in Antiquity, exemplified by such thinkers as Seneca, Epictetus, and Plutarch, in which it is "coextensive with life … an autonomous, self-finalized practice with a *plurality of forms*".[28] Rather than being a means to an end, wherein one must turn one's gaze upon oneself and contemplate the truths that purportedly issue from deep within, the Stoic model serves as a way for the individual "to strive for a status as subject that he has never known … to replace the non-subject with the status of subject defined by the fullness of the self's relationship to the self," enabling them to invent themselves as they uniquely desire.[29] The Stoic model is not entirely free of *gnothi seauton,* although here it is more a knowledge of what one is capable of, rather than what one essentially is; however, it values to a greater degree "working" on the self and adjusting one's way of living to become *autarkic* and *ataraxic*, the latter in the sense of "not being a slave to oneself and one's appetites", particularly the appetite to dominate others.[30] It enables individuals to be singular by not forcing them to fashion themselves in the image of a pre-defined universal telos which would necessitate a particular mode of conduct or other individuals on whom they would depend and by which they would be directed. Such

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[26] Foucault fails to acknowledge that the form of autonomy he champions only emerges with the advent of modernity when the pre-modern spiritual baggage is sublated. He analyzes and evaluates pre-modern spiritual life under the assumption that the agency of modern subjectivity is also present in Antiquity. For similar criticisms, see: Andrew Thacker, "Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence," in *Radical Philosophy* 63 (1993), p.13-21.

[27] Plato, *Apology.* Translated by Harold N. Fowler, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1966). Accessed at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0170%3Atext%3DApol.%3Asection%3D30b, 28/08/2022). 30b.

[28] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.86, emphasis mine.

[29] Ibid., p.129.

[30] Foucault, *The Ethics of the Concern of the Self*, p.286.

individuals maintain constant alertness and resistance to external forces and ideally achieve self-mastery, thereby rendering themselves free of effects of domination. Furthermore, self-care is a vehicle for attaining self-salvation, with salvation meaning "an activity, the subject's constant action on himself" which enables him/her to ensure "happiness, tranquility, serenity, etcetera, for him[/her]self".[31] Foucault, following the Stoics, suggests that "[w]hen the end, the object of salvation, has been attained, you need nothing and no one but yourself".[32] Foucauldian self-salvation, however, is not a final state to be achieved, but is inseparable from the lifelong work carried out on oneself by oneself.

All of this is not to intimate that self-care is entirely divorced from other-relations. First, Foucault emphasizes the indispensability of a master-figure in constituting an individual as a subject in a pedagogical relationship or friendship. The master is "an effective agency (*opérateur*) for producing effects within the individual's reform and in his formation as a subject. He is the mediator in the individual's relationship to his constitution as a subject".[33] Foucault purports that individuals need another person, such as a guide, a counselor, or a friend, to be truthful with them and instigate the process by which they will interminably work on themselves, making them aware of their capacity to be other than what they are. Such a relationship, however, is not an enduring one like the love-relationship or the relationship to the Church which ought to last one's entire life, but rather one which makes the subordinate individuals aware of their capacity for autonomy, enabling them to "then leave the relationship" and become autarkic.[34]

Second, Foucault suggests that the *ethos* of freedom concomitant with self-care is a way of caring for others, albeit inadvertent. He states that by "produc[ing] or induc[ing] behaviour through which one will actually be able to take care of others" without dominating them or overstepping boundaries,[35] self-care "enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships".[36] But such relations are entirely external, figuring secondarily vis-

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.184.

[33] Ibid., p.130.

[34] Ibid., p.379.

[35] Ibid., p.198.

[36] Foucault, *The Ethics of the Concern of the Self*, p.287.

à-vis self-relation for Foucault; the rudimentary aim is for individuals to become fastened to themselves alone and to remain so when relating to others. To become unfastened from oneself, as it were, and integrate with others in a sustained way (i.e. to begin a family, to participate in the State or any higher causes such as mass political movements) leads to blockages constitutive of states of domination in which patterns are established and an order calcifies. "We must", Foucault writes, "turn away from everything that turns us away from our self."[37] As Gros puts it, this culture of the self "offers the active man a rule of quantitative limitation (not allowing political tasks, financial concerns, and diverse obligations to invade life to the extent that he risks forgetting himself)."[38] To forget the self is become vulnerable to domination. Incidentally, external relationships, whether to persons, institutions, or causes cannot but be transactional in that they are only to be maintained if they serve the individual's interests.

Foucault justifies his position that care for others, or other-relations *tout court*, cannot be placed over and against self-care, on the basis that "care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior".[39] By knowing "ontologically what you are … what you are capable of", one reduces one's inclination to dominate others, insofar as such an inclination only arises by virtue of not having cared for oneself enough (although Foucault never substantiates this claim).[40] On this note, Foucault appreciates Plutarch, who holds that such occupation with oneself dilutes individuals' "unhealthy curiosity about others" and keeps them from looking at "what is going on in the houses of other people" and focusing on "what is going on in [their] own". By remaining fixated on oneself, working to diminish the power others wield over him/her, one will have fewer resources to interfere in the lives of others. Evidently, Foucault's conception of ethics does away with firsthand concern for others and a common good, at least as primary foci. Were Foucault to have put forth a theory of ethics not grounded in negative freedom, he would fall into the trap of problematizing particular desires which it is precisely his goal to avoid.

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[37] Ibid., p.206.

[38] Frederic Gros, "Course Context," in *Hermeneutics of the Subject,* by Michel Foucault, translated by Graham Burchell, ed. Frederic Gros (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.541.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p.288.

Foucault holds aesthetics and ethics to be the obverse of one another, making self-care just as much an aesthetic task as an ethical one. Since the self is a historical correlation of technologies, it is continually being constructed, though often in a way that merely reproduces its apparent identity. Foucault clearly prefers for this construction to be an individually directed task. This individually determined process of self-construction is referred to by Foucault, following the Stoics, as a *tekhne tou biou* (art of living), which consists of "making one's life … a beautiful and good work … [and] necessarily entails the freedom and choice of the person employing this *tekhnē*".[41] [42] Self-constructing individuals submit to a *forma* (form), but they do not obey a *regula* (rule), as "neither obedience to the rule nor obedience *tout court* can constitute a beautiful work".[43] In making their lives works of art, individuals constitute themselves as *projects,* and insofar as these projects remain open and in process until death, one's self-relation must retain primacy.

To recapitulate, Foucault puts forth the injunction to make one's life a work of art as a domination-reducing strategy. He justifies this by invoking what I argue is his foundational presupposition—that self-relation and other relatedness are not co-extensive ontologically speaking (that is, other-relatedness is not intrinsically necessary), and that the former is ontologically and ethically prior to the latter. While he rarely states this presupposition outright, it is implicit in much of his work in this final period. One should note that it is unclear what conception of ontology Foucault adopts (to be fair, Foucault does not claim to be 'doing

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[41] Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p.424.

[42] Although, as Hadot points out, "the goal of Stoic exercises is to go beyond the self, and think and act in unison with universal reason," the latter telos being that which Foucault unequivocally rejects. It is Foucault's denial of self-care's linkage to the universal which leads Hadot to claim that Foucault is "focused far too much on the 'self,' or at least on a specific conception of the self." It is, for Hadot, "*too* aesthetic". Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as A Way of Life*. Translated by Michael Chase. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.207; 211.

[43] Foucault, ibid., p. 424. The Stoic conception of self-care does not necessitate the solicitation of a particular normative discourse to construct and master oneself. For example, it does not make any normative stipulations vis-à-vis acceptable sexualities, but rather only stipulates the *form* self-care must take, whereas in Christianity, for example, as Foucault contends, certain sexualities require renunciation to become an acceptable subject, thereby impacting both the form *and* content of subjectivity.

ontology' in the strictly philosophical sense)[44]. It appears—evidenced by statements of aversion to ontologies of "deficiency and desire" and praise toward those of "forces that link together acts, pleasures, and desires", as well as his emphases on fluidity and mobility[45]—he subscribes to something like Deleuze's positive "ethology", in which being is a "crowned anarchy" populated by singularities in a state of pure becoming, but which always remain at base the singularities that they are.[46] [47] Foucault's proposition insinuates that singular, albeit relational, individuality is most in accord with what humans effectively are, and that compromising self-relation's purported primacy does not result in a superior way of living but creates and intensifies relations of domination. Hence, he recommends self-care to bring us closer to a state of congruence with his preferred, albeit ambiguous, ontological model. Hence, there is indeed a categorical assumption implicit in his recommendation. I am certainly not claiming Foucault to be a systematic philosopher *per se* but given that he posits decisive conceptions of philosophical concepts (i.e. self and relation) when discussing other topics and makes the latter depend on these conceptions, it is crucial that one investigate these in a philosophical way.

Given that Foucault does not articulate how he derives this assumption or from where he imports it, making it little more than an arbitrarily posited axiom, one ought to verify its legitimacy before taking his recommendations seriously. Can we agree with Foucault that self-relation is primary? To conduct this investigation in a way that does not simply pit one axiomatic account against another and remains faithful to the principles of immanence and freedom on which Foucault purports to rely, one requires an onto-*logical* method that enables one to apprehend the immanent development of being itself, such that one can see how various determinacies emerge on their own terms, rather than pulling an assumption out of thin air and then searching for grounds by which to confirm

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[44] For one interpretation, which I find philosophically unsatisfactory, see Gianfranco Ferrari, "The Care of the Present: on Foucault's Ontological Machine," in *The Late Foucault*. Edited by Marta Faustino and Gianfranco Ferrara (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 115-131.

[45] Foucault, *Use of Pleasure*, p.43.

[46] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020). p.48.

[47] Béatrice Han treats this problem in her *L'ontologie manquée de Michel Foucault*, arguing that there is a 'missed ontology' in Foucault's corpus. Béatrice Han, *L'ontologie manquée de Michel Foucault* (Grenoble: Millon, 1998).

it. Hegel's *Science of Logic*—the transition to which admittedly marks a considerably vast shift from the readily intelligible explication that precedes us—enables us to do so.

CRITIQUE WITH HEGEL'S *LOGIC*

Though beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive account of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, it is nevertheless helpful to briefly qualify its relevance. The *Logic* is a wholly self-critical system, hinging on no tacitly assumed presuppositions or dogmatically asserted axioms which would make its conclusions relative to a first principle. Despite the standard charges of totalitarianism often launched against Hegel, the *Logic* is radically autonomous and self-determining, and thus presents an ontology that is "free" in the most immanent sense.[48] Employing the Hegelian text for critique is not a way of simply pitting one philosopher against another, but rather allows concepts held fast by other philosophers to reveal their potential deficiencies on their own terms. Foucault's theory of the self, as we have seen, is conceived in reference to historically contingent anthropological content, rather than the *a priori* logical structures we find in Hegel's *Logic* (though these structures, as Hegel tells us, only reach completion at a certain point in history, giving them historical import as well). Notwithstanding, Foucault implicitly relies on a certain categorical schema, as the subject about which he theorizes must reflect a certain immutable form to be capable of autarky but also to remain mobile in relation to its surroundings. Thus, the relevance of Hegel's logic vis-à-vis Foucault's historicist philosophy of concrete human life must not be underestimated, as it will verify the solidity of the latter's categorical underpinnings.

To meet Foucault on his own grounds, we must make our way to the Doctrine of Essence in the *Logic,* wherein the structure of other-relatedness first emerges. Before moving to this, a few remarks are first in order. It may seem that, given Hegel's treatment of Stoicism in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* as well as his criticisms of the 'natural will' and 'arbitrary will' in *Philosophy of Right* (to which comparisons with Foucauldian subjectivity might

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[48] For a wholesale justification of this perspective, see Stephen Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel's* Logic: *From Being to Infinity* (West Lafayette: Purdue, 2006); Richard Dien Winfield, *Overcoming Foundations* (New York: Columbia, 1989).

easily be drawn), the most obvious approach to the task I have set out to accomplish here would be best carried out using one of these texts; however, given that it is the specifically categorical determinacies implicit in Foucault's enterprise with which I take issue, it is the *Logic* which equips us most sufficiently. In fairness to Foucault, despite Hegel's undermining treatment of Stoicism, he nonetheless claims that the Stoic turn into the self is permissible during historical periods when "the visible world has become untrue to freedom [and] the will no longer finds itself in the established morality [and] it is forced to seek the harmony, which the actual world has lost, in the inner ideal life."[49] Given that it is Foucault's quintessential claim that the modern world is not amenable to individual freedom, one might argue that Foucault is justified in turning to Stoicism in Hegel's eyes. Notwithstanding, Hegel's criteria for deeming a social order not amenable to freedom are rigorously systematically and immanently derived, whereas the same cannot be said of Foucault's genealogical analyses. Thus, Foucault cannot simply be let off the hook for deploying unexamined determinacies even if we might find a Hegelian justification for his general trajectory.

The *Science of Logic* begins with the Doctrine of Being, the sphere of immediacy wherein all determinacies are on the same level, as it were, varying qualitatively and quantitatively but all sharing the same immediacy. For one unfamiliar with Hegel, it may seem counter-intuitive to summon a text about essence, commonly conceived as the underlying immutable foundation of things, to engage with Foucault, a resolute anti-essentialist in the traditional metaphysical sense. However, Hegel's conception of essence—the sphere of reflection and relation, both of which are categorical hinge points of Foucauldian self-care—describes a sphere which immanently emerges as a result of being's self-sublation. Being comprises countless transient states which reveal themselves to be part of an enduring *process* of alteration and transition. This process reveals itself to be indifferent and irreducible to its particular states, containing all the determinations of being but not itself subject to the same rules of the immediacies it comprises. What initially appears to be a series of independent immediacies

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[49] G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right.* Translated by S.W. Dyde (London: G Bell, 1896). Retrieved from www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/philosophy-of-right.pdf. §138, Remark.

now appears to be underpinned by something more "essential", with the immediacies proving to be a reflection (*Reflexion*) of what lies beneath. We get to this "beneath" not by virtue of suspicion which causes us to externally reflect on putative immediacy and hypostatize something more essential below, but thanks to immediate being's own immanent revelation that it is not what it initially seems. Rather, essence is "being coming into mediation with itself through the negativity of itself … being reflecting light into itself".[50] Arising within the immanent movement of being, reflection is "not just an operation of thought", but "an *ontological* structure."[51]

Essence *posits* (*Setzen)* determinacies, the apparent immediacy of which is actually a mere *reflection* of that which posits. Because it is the result of being's self-negation, there is nothing external and thus immediately opposed to essence; it contains its own distinction from being within itself and must maintain it to be the sphere of total mediation that it is. Essence relates to itself via its posited determinacies which are posited *as* distinct from it. But because they are *posited* as distinct, and are what enable essence to relate to itself, essence must in fact depend on its positedness: it is "the showing of the illusory being of essence within essence itself", which allows essence to relate to itself as the determiner that it is.[52] But moreover, since essence by nature posits its positedness which then reflects essence back onto itself, the very movement of reflection must play a determining role vis-à-vis essence. Because essence relates to itself by positing something that reflects it, it also mediates itself through that which it posits and mediates, an idea which unsettles the metaphysical notion of an immutable underlying substrate. One must be careful not to think essence as self-determining per se, as it depends upon the movement of reflection for its self-relation, even if this reflection results from its own positing. Therefore, despite initially seeming to differ from immediate being on account of its enduring self-subsistence, its self-subsistence will eventually end up proving to still depend on a posited other, or its *non-being*

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[50] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Translated by William Wallace, (Oxford: Oxford University, 1975a). p.162.

[51] Stephen Houlgate, "Essence, Reflexion, and Immediacy in Hegel's *Science of Logic*," in *A Companion to Hegel*. eds. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur, (Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2011). p.142.

[52] G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*. Translated by A.V. Miller. ed. H. D. Lewis, (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Paperback Library, 1989), p.409.

with which it does not identify itself, as will end up changing once we reach the Doctrine of the Concept.

Essence must posit determinacies in order to relate to itself, and it is the different forms of relations between essence and positedness that Hegel lays out in the chapter, "The Determinations of Reflection." Here its relevance vis-à-vis Foucault's assumption becomes apparent. The first determination is identity which is essence as "pure equality-with-self."[53] This is most intelligibly expressed in the law of identity: A=A. Identity quickly gets undermined, as to assert identity requires iteration (i.e. one must say A *is* A, as opposed to simply stating "A" without the copula and A's repetition, to get identity). Because iteration consists of a (different) repetition of the same thing, identity cannot be thought apart from difference. Identity asserts that it is "nothing but itself", but in this very enunciation invokes difference, which is precisely "the nothing which is said in enunciating identity".[54] Essence can only be self-identical thanks to this nothing— its non-being—which it necessarily invokes to assert that it is *itself* and not another. In positing itself, essence sets up a difference within itself by repelling itself from itself and then continually reappropriating this difference, via reflection, and then setting it up again, to affirm its identity. This diremption within itself will be necessary to continuously ascertain its identity.

Essence is self-identical because of the difference between it and its positedness, with difference being "the simple *not*", the diremption itself.[55] As such, essence is just as much absolute difference as it is identity. Because the positedness reflects essence, which is constitutively self-related, the positedness also must be self-related and self-subsistent because it only reflects what essence is. Essence and positedness both contain the moment of reflection-into-self that gives rise to self-relation, which brings us from absolute difference to diversity. Diversity (*Verschiedenheit*) is a mode of difference in which its "distinguished terms *subsist* as indifferently different towards one another because each is self-identical".[56] In other words, they do not contain "diversity" as part of their

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[53] Ibid., p.410.

[54] Ibid., p.417.

[55] Ibid., p.417.

[56] Ibid., p.418.

intrinsic determination, like they do self-identity. Diversity arises when determinacies are seen *only* as *self*-identical and not necessarily bound up with others.

One can note here in passing that diversity, wherein the terms are reflected into themselves and indifferent to others, is the conceptual determinacy undergirding what Foucault envisions the social might look like if individuals were to privilege self-relation *over and against* other-relations and maintain themselves in a state of indifference toward one another, remaining fixated on their own self-reflection. Relations to others would not be seen as bound up with the very constitution of the self but would rather be seen as secondary and merely external (or mechanical, to use a determinacy that will arise later in Hegel's *Logic*) However, the self-relatedness of each term in diversity can only result because of the preceding difference between the terms. As I clarify below, self-relation will prove not to exhaustively characterize the diverse terms but will be only one of two facets.

In diversity, the elements are, at first glance, what they are regardless of any external relations. Such relations, at least in their initial appearance, are external to immediate individuality and ostensibly have no impact on the latter itself. The "truth" of diversity (i.e. likeness/unlikeness of diverse elements, as well as their very ontological standing *as* diverse unrelated elements) can, however, only be designated by a third-party adjudicator (what Hegel terms "external reflection"). While tangential the central claim of this paper, it is nonetheless crucial to note here that it is such a third-party adjudication that Foucault equates to the exercise of power (i.e. normalization and classification techniques). Such a third-party, socially or politically-speaking, holds individuals to arbitrary standards which, when adopted by these individuals themselves, wrest them from primary relation-to-self. The idea of such a third-party, not immanent to the development of the social to itself, but rather something transcendent and excessive, arises precisely by holding fast to the position of diversity. One could argue that because he adopts a view of individuals as diverse and merely externally related as far as their ontological "essence" is concerned, as we find here in the Doctrine of Essence, Foucault's position is one of external reflection. This position is inextricable from the one that holds any sort of generalization or universalization to be a transcendent exercise of power which we could ideally do without. By claiming

the *priority* of self-relation and singularity, Foucault will find himself unable to envision a society in which subjects are not constantly seeking to escape external control. It is the very perspective which enables Foucault to view individuals as singular and diverse that also requires him to see power as inescapable (though, remember, this is also what allows him to acknowledge the presence of freedom), leading only to its repetition rather than overcoming. What's more, given the externally reflective position Foucault takes, it is Foucault himself who becomes a "third-party" formally speaking.

Hegel goes on to demonstrate that such a third party at the ontological level is in fact not simply a transcendent Other who enters the scene from elsewhere to compare and contrast the indifferent elements, but rather reflection that has immanently become external to its moments. To clarify, its moments at this point are two *identities* and hence differ by being *separately* self-related. But it was *one* act of reflection which gave rise to these two separate identities. Once it has done so, reflection does not simply dissipate—it must remain on the scene for this separateness to persist—but externalizes itself from its moments. Thus, this third party is immanent to the very notion of diversity. Certainly, Foucault's criticism of normalization takes place in a different realm than Hegel's *Logic;* however, the *Logic*'s structures ought not to be regarded as 'merely' logical, but logical structures invested with ethical significance. Despite that Hegel is not arguing here specifically about the necessity of certain norms and institutions (this he does in *Philosophy of Right* and *Philosophy of Mind*), the conceptual logic he is developing indeed forms the basis of his later justifications (though, he will there demonstrate the difference between arbitrary and legitimate institutions, societies, and states[57]).

External reflection groups together the diverse elements on the basis of likeness (*Gleichheit*) and unlikeness (*Ungleichheit*). Since unlike things are quite unlike one another, they are like one another in this very sense and thus are negatively unified. Their unrelatedness and putative indifference is itself a type of relatedness and thus diversity, "whose *indifferent* sides are just as much simply and

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[57] For example, see "Abstract Right" in *Philosophy of Right,* wherein Hegel problematizes the Hobbesian conception of the State.

solely *moments* of one negative unity" turns into *opposition*.[58] The mutual (in)difference of the diverse elements is only possible because they are different "*through a determination.*"[59] Diverse elements may at first appear indifferent to the external designations of likeness and unlikeness; however, they implicitly rely on one another for their mutual indifference. To hold fast to diversity is to hold fast to reflection-into-self which is only reflection-into-self by virtue of *not* being reflection-into-other. By not being reflection-into-other, the diverse elements sustain their self-identities, but it is the "not" in their determination as "not-reflected-into-other" that enables their self-reflection. Hence, negated (or disavowed) reflection-into-other is part and parcel of reflection-into-self. Opposition will render explicit this tension that keeps the diverse elements separate.

In opposition (*Gegensatz*) the moments, which Hegel designates the positive and the negative, "are different *in one identity* and thus are opposites."[60] That is, each term reveals itself to be both itself and its other because each is what it is by not being the other. Each has reference to itself by virtue of containing its non-being within itself, from which it is itself *nothing but the return*. Hence, opposition reveals diverse elements to in fact be internally related, and necessarily so.

The positive and the negative are both self-subsistent unities-with-themselves, albeit in subtly different ways. The positive is the "not-opposite … but as a side of the opposition itself" and though, as with the negative, it is determined with reference to its non-being, it is determined in such a way as "to be *not* something posited" and thus explicitly depends on nothing but itself.[61] Hence, it could be seen as the logical determination of autarky. The positive maintains its identity and self-subsistence as positive only inasmuch as it continuously excludes the negative from itself. This excluding activity necessarily endures; if the positive were to forego such exclusion, it would relinquish its own identity qua not-posited. Coming into view is the conceptual underpinnings of the Foucauldian subject which, in aiming to positively determine itself as *not* determined by technologies

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[58] Ibid., p.421.

[59] Ibid., p.422.

[60] Ibid., p.424.

[61] Ibid., p.426.

of domination, must rely on that which it excludes. But for this reason, it must continue to attract what it excludes for its determinacy to withstand. If this tension were to evaporate, so would its self-subsistence. Indeed, Foucault's ethics is not entirely negatively determined. One might refer to his *Friendship as a Way of Life* to see examples of the affirmative ideas Foucault proposes for conducting one's life ethically. Nonetheless, because Foucault avoids sweeping maxims, these examples cannot count as universal prescriptions and thus, they are devoid of intrinsic necessity. The negative remains the primary element of the project.

Though the negative is not of the same level of concern as the positive in the present paper, given the congruence of the positive with the Foucauldian individual, one can briefly characterize it as "the intrinsically opposite as such".[62] That is, while the positive is self-related by virtue of not-being-opposite, it nonetheless stands in opposition to the opposite *qua opposite*. Like absolute difference vis-à-vis identity, it is the negative which enables the positive to "*not-be-opposite*", but which nonetheless requires the positive against which it can be determined as self-related in its very non-identity. Going forward, I zero in on the flaws of the positive to a greater degree than the negative, but it is not my intention to glorify the latter as if to suggest Foucault chose the wrong side of the opposition on which to model the individual's ontological determinacy; prioritizing either side of the opposition is problematic given their constitutive one-sidedness.

FOUCAULDIAN SELF-RELATION

At this point, what can we deduce from this logic of essence about Foucault's position on self-relation? Apropos of Foucault's commitment to reducing domination and privileging reflection-into-self, we can refer back to the determinacy of diversity. Recall that diversity, wherein the terms are in a state of mutual indifference and merely external relatedness, is categorically unsustainable, owing its credence to the oppositional tension which sustains the indifference constitutive of its terms. Diversity necessarily leads to opposition (again, this is indeed a logical claim, but logical claims in Hegel are never 'merely logical'—they reflect the structures of reality, whether we like it or not). In

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[62] Ibid., p.431, emphasis mine.

opposition, it becomes clear that each term's self-relation is only possible by excluding the other. Thus, self-relation is in fact logically *secondary* to other-relatedness, at least at this point in the *Logic*. Put in more concrete terms, the positive cannot constitute itself *as positive* prior to its exclusion of its own otherness—this act cannot be a mere afterthought—because it is in this very exclusion that it constitutes itself. What's more, this exclusion cannot take place once and for all, but must endure. It depends on the other which it excludes, because it is only in this very movement of exclusion and return that it can be independent at all.

Foucault's claim regarding self-relation's ontological primacy is therefore mistaken, and his desire to refute internal relationality on ontological grounds untenable. Foucault indeed anticipates this very Hegelian rebuttal regarding the circumvention of other-relatedness by introducing the necessity of the mediating master-figure who incites individuals to care for themselves, shaking them out of their dogmatic slumber and into an agentic subject striving toward autarky and ataraxy. However, Foucault neglects to examine autarky's categorical underpinnings. That is, he suggests that the individual can eventually leave the master-student relationship and be independent of others, failing to acknowledge that independence *from* others (rather than identification *with* others, as is the case when Hegel's version of the master-student relationship concludes) as a determination to be steadfastly maintained is itself one that depends on the others which it must exclude. Furthermore, given that Foucault's renovation of self-care involves reforming one's subjectivity as a means of political resistance, individuals must construct themselves as decisively *non*-normative subjects, and hence must continually use the normative subject as a baseline against which to determine themselves.

This mistaken ontological assumption of Foucault's is not one that we might acknowledge while leaving everything else intact, as it contaminates the prescription he develops on its logical basis. When the injunction to make one's life a work of art is put into practice, its effects cannot be those for which Foucault hoped, both in terms of its effect on society at large and on the tenacity and courage of the individuals themselves to transform their own subjectivity. To determine what effects privileging oneself over and against others might have when this logic is carried out fully, we need to see what happens in the dialectic of opposition.

OPPOSITION TO CONTRADICTION; OR, SELF-DESTRUCTION

Not only does the positive depend on its non-being for its self-subsistence, making it a *mediated* self-subsistence, but through the very exclusion of the negative, it makes its own self "the *negative* of what it excludes from itself", or "the negative of the negative".[63] The twist here is that the positive is positive only because it *excludes* the negative, but with this exclusion it turns itself into a negative by determining itself as the opposite (as "*not*-opposite") of *its* opposite. Put another way, it must acknowledge the existence of the negative to assert its own *non*-negativity, but in so doing, it confers positive status on the negative and renders itself the negative's negative. By its own criteria, the positive as such necessarily excludes itself from itself because this negativity is part of its very determination *as* positive. Hence, the positive is manifestly *contradiction*.

In stubbornly maintaining itself as *not* related to its non-being, the positive brings itself to its own demise. Not only does it negate that on which it relies, it ends up negating *itself* by making itself the negative of that very negative it excludes and subsequently, by its own logic, excludes itself from itself. While the positive appears to be determining itself as self-identical, it is in fact "an identity-with-self that is a relation-to-other".[64] The result of holding fast to such an identity—even when, at the level of the everyday self, the contingent content which animates it is in constant flux, as Foucault means when he enjoins us to remain mobile and unfixed while not giving way to self-relation's attenuation or destruction at the level of *form*—is that the positive negates itself. The negative, in holding fast to itself as negative-and-*not*-positive, will do the same. Thus, they produce their mutual cancellation and result in what Hegel names "the null".[65]

But Hegel goes on to demonstrate how this mutual cancellation is not the sole possible resolution of contradiction, since to assume it were would be to focus only on the moment of exclusion, and not on the obverse positing moment. That is, in excluding its non-being, the positive simultaneously posits that non-being, which also necessarily posits *it* (recall that each moment of the opposition is self-subsistent, but as a product of a single reflection). Hence, it also converts itself into a positedness. In the moment when the exclusive determination excludes

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[63] Ibid., p.432.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

itself from itself precisely by holding fast to itself, consequently transforming itself into the other of itself, it is also true that "the *exclusive determination itself* is that *other* of itself whose negation it is".[66] In simpler terms, the positive, in determining itself as *not*-negative, necessarily and simultaneously posits the negative. But because it winds up turning *itself* into a negative of that which it posits, its cancellation of itself as positive only results in its positive *unity* with that which *it* posited *only to exclude*. Self-subsistence, Hegel states, "is thus through its *own* negation a unity returned into itself, since it returns into itself through the negation of *its own* positedness".[67] The positive finds its self-identity only by negating *itself* as a walled-up, stubbornly contrarian individual, and finding itself in its positedness. The upshot is that the non-being which initially appeared to threaten the positive's destruction by not allowing it to be a self-identical individual resolutely independent of others, while also implicitly being that which enables the positive's self-constitution, in fact only forces the positive to negate *itself*. It is not a destruction that comes from without by virtue of something like violence or domination, but something it does to itself. With this, might one surmise that Foucault's goal of reducing socio-political domination is only accomplished by turning such domination inward, toward one's own self? One this note, one must insist on asking Thacker's question regarding the struggle for ataraxy: "how can we recognise when power over the self becomes domination over the self?"[68] Do Foucault's injunctions end up reproducing the same effects he aims to jettison, something which could be avoided were he to have begun with a self-critically derived conception of the self?

As already stated, self-relation is actually a secondary effect of other-relatedness when it comes to the determination of the positive which works to maintain itself as an individual totally separate from others, but we must be cautious not to conflate this with Hegel's final position. In the *Logic's* final chapter, "The Absolute Idea", Hegel reveals how self- and other-relatedness are co-constitutive, neither being privileged over the other like is the case here in the Doctrine of Essence. The determinations found in the latter, as has been

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[66] Ibid., p.434.

[67] Ibid., p.433.

[68] Thacker, *Foucault's Aesthetics of Existence*, p.17.

demonstrated by Abazari, are indeed indicative of asymmetrical relations of power and self-undermining conceptions of self- and other-relations; however, they do not describe the ideal (and definitively possible) mode of human relationality.[69] In the Absolute Idea, the subject possesses *personality*, which is "impenetrable atomic subjectivity—but which, nonetheless, is not exclusive individuality, but explicitly *universality* and *cognition*, and in its other has *its own* subjectivity".[70] We can say that the subject possesses the strength, tenacity, and freedom Foucault desires (although a conception different from the negative freedom he presupposes), but only insofar as it is identified *with* others, and consequently, with the structures and institutions which enable such interdependent co-existence to flourish. We find an intelligible example of this in love, which "consists in giving up the consciousness of oneself, forgetting oneself in another self, yet in this surrender and oblivion, having and possessing oneself alone".[71] It is precisely by unfastening the self from itself that it can attain itself, finding itself at home with itself in its otherness. Such a self will contain both the positive and the negative (albeit by this point in the *Logic* they will have transformed into more developed forms which are universality and particularity) and this internal division, illuminated in its relations to others, will be its very source of vitality.

We have a similar conclusion in the culmination of contradiction in the Doctrine of Essence, albeit in less developed form, where the positive unites with itself in its positedness, giving us an idea of how the Foucauldian problem might be remedied. As the Hegelian dialectic reveals, to be self-related is to be other-related—a stance which Foucault may not find fault with, as per his suggestion in his discussion of Alcibiades that self-care is a way of taking care of others—*and* to be other-related is to be self-related. The latter truth disrupts the ground on which Foucault stands, as he privileges a particular ordering of the relata and insists on keeping them separate (i.e., self-relation and *then* other-relations, rather than both being co-extensive) rather than speculatively identical as is the case in

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[69] See Arash Abazari, "Opposition" in *Hegel's Ontology of Power: The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2020).

[70] Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.824.

[71] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art.* Translated by Thomas M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University, 1975b). pp.539-40.

the *Logic's* culmination. That other-relatedness would come first or, moreover, would be part of what it means to be self-related at all is something the late Foucault cannot accept without his whole argument becoming feeble. For Hegel, to deny the immanent necessity of internal relationality is, contra Foucault, to stifle the subject's very autonomy—not a Kantian autonomy, but one which is relational without being reduced to heteronomy. Such internally related individuals are indeed constantly "becoming", as Foucault desires in his continuation of the Nietzschean tradition, but interdependently. As Abazari writes, "Hegel is not one who regards everything to be in a state of constant flux, such that no ontological identity could possibly obtain. For Hegel, there *are* individuals, but these individuals are derived from the relations that obtain between them".[72] Were Foucault to adopt the complementarity between selfhood and otherness as is revealed in the Absolute Idea, then one might infer how his project, upon revisions, could be redeemed. We might then receive, for example, a quasi-Hegelian theory of resistance, any explicit trace of which is missing in the Hegelian text itself.[73] Furthermore, if Foucault were to accept this complementarity, we may not see the debate regarding whether Foucault is a determinist or a Cartesian to be a dilemma at all, since self and other would be conceived in a speculative-dialectical, rather than a dualistic framework from the outset.

Because Foucault's prescription is precisely for individuals to become autarkic by, first and foremost, *not* being obedient juridico-economic subjects, this self-subsistence certainly depends on that from which individuals seek to extract themselves. Furthermore, because Foucault insists on maintaining this self-subsistence, his prescription can only end up stifling the dialectical movement inherent to the determination itself which, when loosened from its fixity and released into its own immanent movement, indeed causes self-negation (perhaps better termed self-transcendence) but not the wholesale self-negation that results in subjugation or total annihilation by the other. It becomes *formally* other than itself and in so doing finds itself. It is this formal becoming-other that Foucault's

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[72] Abazari, *Hegel's Ontology of Power*, p.49.

[73] This is arguably the task of Slavoj Žižek's philosophical project, to which several parallels might be drawn with Foucault's. See: *Less Than Nothing*.

logic prohibits, valorizing only becoming-other in terms of one's quotidian existence which relies on a certain underlying form, reminiscent of Cartesian subjectivity. Thus, contra Davidson, who argues that "Foucault's conceptualization of ethics as the self's relation to itself does *not depend* on any modern understanding of subjectivity," I must disagree.[74] Because Foucauldian individuals must continue to insist on their individualist self-relation, the subject cannot but inflict damage upon itself and others in some way, even if not via the same modes of domination that Foucault seeks to eradicate. As Byung-Chul Han notes, a conception of relationality in which the atomic self is privileged over and against the other does not in fact do away with the negativity constitutive of the domination Foucault derides, as it "devalues and repels the other in favour of the self", not eliminating this negativity but redirecting it back onto itself.[75] It is not my intention to make hypotheses about the psycho-social effects of preserving positive self-relation, nor to provide a more informed political prescription to replace Foucault's. Rather, I only aim to show the categorical unsustainability of Foucauldian self-care. Nevertheless, one can well imagine the political ramifications associated with taking cues from an enterprise mired in categorical confusion.

CONCLUSION

I endeavoured here to demonstrate the foundation on which Foucault's solution to reducing domination hinges and to verify its legitimacy. Despite his commitment to immanence and freedom, his reliance on an underived ontological axiom and the subsequent development of a set of recommendations based upon it cannot but lead to effects antithetical to what Foucault desired. With Hegel, we were able to determine the specific exclusions on which Foucauldian individuals must rely. By privileging self-subsistence, and hence viewing self-relation and other-relatedness as two separable relations which may contingently intersect *but which need not*, individuals in fact end up relying on others

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[74] Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Second Edition.* Edited by Gary Gutting, (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2005), 123-148. p.141.

[75] Byung-Chul Han, *Topology of Violence.* Translated by Amanda Demarco. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018). p.27.

in a way which implicitly drags along the same impasses Foucault seeks to eliminate.

What's more, because the positive individual invariably turns itself into the negative of what it thinks it determines itself to be, it invites its own negation. Although this negation can proceed in two directions, Foucault's recommendations point toward the self-destructive route. While Foucault's desire for fluidity, mobility, and openness to the future would seem to imply a willingness to accept what emerges immanently, such fluidity and mobility at a societal level can only be maintained by preserving atomistic individuality and the self-interest with which it is concomitant. In other words, the fluidity Foucault exalts can only be maintained if individuals retain a rigid attachment to themselves (formally speaking—not the contingent content they perform) and a willingness to turn away from anything that might turn them from themselves, as Gros claimed earlier.

On a final note, one ought to bear in mind that Foucault's recommendations for self-care are based on the concept's Antique origins but reinvigorated with inspiration from the countercultural cabals in which he was personally involved. Counterculture, for Foucault, is a fruitful vehicle for subverting the dominant order and experimenting with the limits of necessity; however, any success it might enjoy is only because of its *counter*cultural status. That is, not adopted by the many and enjoyed precisely because it stands opposed to banal "normalcy". The ontological tension between the obedient majority and the counter-cultural few may be significant enough for the latter to enjoy and preserve the marginal position it occupies because it can continually work to cynically negate the latter without having its own negation become a real possibility, which would impede the friction on which it feeds for its own vitality and ostensible independence: however, once that which it must negate to be *counter*cultural withers and the many is seduced by the injunction to transgress and create novel modes of subjectivity, without normative framework to justify why, then one cannot but wish Foucault would have foreseen the implications of transgression and disobedience becoming themselves the most "normal" injunctions.

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