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**Towards A Complex, Active, Human-Centered Subject
Grounded in the Sociopolitical:
*A Symbiosis of Edmund Husserl and Michel Foucault***

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Abstract

This thesis responds to the questions “With the empirical, ‘found’ world prevalent as the paradigm for all valid knowledge, what happened to the relevance of the human in knowledge? Is there an alternative that does not divorce the knower from the knowing?” The ideas of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984), two thinkers traditionally viewed as rivals in continental philosophy and social theory, animate these questions. Both philosophers critique the taken-for-granted aspects of the world: Husserl through the *constituting* subject and Foucault through the socially, linguistically, and historically *constituted* subject. Rather than an either-or that oversimplifies the subject, a dialogue and a symbiosis between these two thinkers point to the foundation of an active, meaning-endowing subject in which this subject is enmeshed in intersubjective power relations and in which certain knowledges are subjugated to others. Through a combined critique, it is possible to continue an investigation beyond a discursive level, to desediment more layers of knowledge, and to continue to critique the always-already there in order to understand *enduring* constitutions and the subject’s *becoming*.

Scientia et Sapaentia. *Knowledge and Wisdom. The herald of intellectual inquiry that presides over Illinois Wesleyan. In the spirit of this intellectual tradition, I continue:*

We have learned and continue to learn great things from the methods we have used and continue to use in sociology. From controversial studies such as Laud Humphreys's *Tearoom Trade*¹ to the less notorious studies such as Stewart Lockie et al's study on organic food consumption,² our sociological methodology has taught us a great deal about social interaction, socialization, social norms, and other social factors. But something is missing. That something? A focus on the concrete subject qua subject qua agent qua human being. Perhaps this missing piece is due to the fact that we have gone about studying social interaction in a way that relies heavily on the notion of a "found" world with certain empirical rules, a notion that divorces the knower from the knowing. In an academic setting in which empirical methods of statistical facts and natural laws and a belief in the existence of a "found" world (in a word, positivism) govern, not just in sociology, but also in the general way in which academia is "done," I find myself asking: What happened to the relevance of the human in knowledge and wisdom? Is there an alternative to positivism in presenting a critique? A critique that does not rely on a strategy that uncritically posits positive, objective, "found" knowledge as the paradigm for all valid knowledge? And what might we find if we turn back to the human, the agent, the subject?

This thesis is my response to the above questions, questions that a rivalry in social theory and continental philosophy animates: that between the ideas of Edmund Husserl and Michel Foucault. Both Husserl and Foucault critique the taken-for-granted aspects of the world around

¹ Laud Humphrey. *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. 1970.

² Lockie, Stewart, et al. "Eating 'Green': Motivations Behind Organic Food Consumption in Australia." 2002.

us and what we perceive as always-already there: Husserl through the *constituting* subject and Foucault through the socially, linguistically, and historically *constituted* discursive subject.³

Differing versions of the subject in Foucauldian post-structuralism and in Husserlian transcendental phenomenology are, however, traditionally viewed as opposing each other—the subject is either one or the other.⁴ This rivalry, however, rests on an oversimplification of the subject that singularizes, compartmentalizes, and restricts the plurality of the subject's world.⁵ It does not allow for the complexity of what it means for the human to be in the world, of the world, *and* experiencing and knowing the world. In response to this simplification, I move for a new sociological methodology: a move for a return to human that focuses on the subject's

³ Another possible way of explaining this concept of constituted subject is Zach Summers's term being-in-society (93), an extension of Sartre's being in relation to others which emphasizes how this being *is given* its meaning through the governing structures and rules of the social body. Similarly, Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes* provides an explanation of the role of the gaze in constituting the subject: "The non-reciprocity between the look and the eye, between being the subject and the object of the gaze, is in fact related to a fundamental struggle for power. For the one who casts the look is always subject and the one who is its target is always turned into an object... self is constituted by the gaze of the other: 'L'autre me voit, donc je suis' [The other sees me, therefore I am]" (288). While these examples expand more on the concept of constituted subject, I contend, as Summers does in his project of grounded ethics, that these Sartrean notions need a Foucauldian understanding of sociopolitical relations to further explain the relationships between the subject and others (emphasis on plurality of others) rather than just the Other (singular).

⁴ William Schroeder, p 621-622; Serge Valdinoci, p. 73 and 100; Bernard Charles Flynn, p. 228.

⁵ Perhaps one of the clearest examples of rigidity in constituting versus constituted subject is that of identity. For the constituting subject, an individual only knows within the scope of his or her race, sex, culture, etc. and can only extend that knowledge politically within that particular realm. This argument for a constituting subject in identity is detrimental in that it leads to the categorizing and compartmentalization of who can and cannot know and, thus, who can or cannot "legitimately" act. For example, only women can understand sexism and thus are the only ones who know enough to battle sexism. *OR*, for the constituted subject, an individual only knows because s/he is given and formed within a certain sociopolitical framework from which to work. For example, the fact of my woman-ness and what I am permitted to do as woman comes from a discursive struggle over a gender binary as well as what is deemed natural or unnatural for me to do. This constituted subject in identity is detrimental in that it leads to a resignation to linguistic and cultural relativism. The opposition within the inquiry into identity is causal and unambiguous. There is a definitive end and a definitive beginning point.

agency while not forgetting the sociopolitical forces at play. While Henry Rubin⁶ and David Fryer⁷ also contend that phenomenology and post-structuralism are compatible, I will use the conflict between phenomenology and post-structuralism to pose a new method of understanding the subject. Widening and furthering their projects, not resolving one thinker into the other, produces a new methodology that seeks to put the agency back into the human while allowing for social and historical factors that affect her constituting. This new methodology is a return to the self that underscores the importance of the individual agency and that does not deny the demands, structures, and relations of the world around. It is an acknowledgement of the complexity of the world, a complexity beyond wildest imagination and a focus on how we are concretely in the world. A symbiosis that retains Foucault's and Husserl's dynamism, this new methodology of *becoming* takes into account the formation of a subject while not divorcing the knower from the knowing.

Husserlian Transcendental Phenomenology: *Away from Naïve Objectivism, Toward Transcendental Subjectivity and Intended Consciousness*

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was a German mathematician and philosopher whose project focused on bringing what is implicit and viewed as common sense in the world to a reflective place. Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936) continues from *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1931). In

⁶ Rubin compares Sartre and Foucault to claim that phenomenology and post-structuralism are compatible, but his explanation of Sartre's levels of bodily ontology to understand transgendered identities is more akin to Husserl's constituting, meaning-endowing subject, and hence the reason for using Husserl rather than Sartre in my comparison.

⁷ While Fryer ("Toward a Phenomenology of Gender...") uses Foucault and Husserl together to push for a Husserlian methodology of gender, I will expand Foucault and Husserl in relation to the subject in general rather than Foucault and Husserl in relation to sex and gender.

both of these books, Husserl describes his project of transcendental phenomenology as a response to science's unquestioned reliance on positivistic proof and belief in uncovering the so-called truth through uncovering the supposedly independently existing objective world. This type of phenomenology focuses on the transcendental conditions that underlie human experience, including the experience of worldliness itself and what makes experience possible.

The transcendental condition is consciousness. This consciousness is not the opposite of subconsciousness or of unconsciousness. Consciousness is the source for phenomena and for our making sense of the world, of giving it shape and meaning—in whatever shape it takes and in whatever way we go about it.⁸ Husserl states, “[W]e are subjects for this world... experiencing it, contemplating it, valuing it, related to it purposefully; for us this surrounding world has only the ontic meaning given to it by our experiencings, our thoughts, our valuations, etc.”⁹ In simplest terms, what we know of the world and of world-ness, we know from our *experience* of the world.

Through the voluntary philosophical stance called the phenomenological reduction—or epoché—the phenomenologist¹⁰ arrives at this transcendental level of experience. In the epoché, the individual brackets what she knows, recognizing the possibility of its not being known.¹¹ In enacting the epoché, she calls into question what had been simply accepted as obvious—materiality, causation, value, meaning for others, etc.—in order to shake up stuck, rigid

⁸ Thus, the Surrealist questions of what is reality and what do we really see, influences from the Freudian push for the validity of dreams and the unconscious, are not discredited here, but are opened up as very real possibilities for meaning-endowing consciousness.

⁹ Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Crisis)*, p. 105, sic.

¹⁰ The phenomenologist is any individual enacting the epoché in his/her inquiry.

¹¹ This reduction is not an easily summarized mental technique in which one can follow steps 1-5 and tah-dah! end up at an immediate outcome. Rather, it is a process that requires continuous reflection.

sediments of knowledges and to expose an individual's uninterrogated accepted claims.¹² From this bracketing, the world as world and its phenomena as *intentional correlates of transcendental subjectivity* become evident. Phenomena are revealed as meant objects; that is, phenomena are recognized as signified as object by a subject, as a particular object with a specific meaning as well as a specific manner in which the object is presented by consciousness. Objects are not things outside of a subject, her consciousness, constituting them as such.

This constitution is not static. The essences of an object or of phenomena are aspects or qualities of an object *as intended*. A comment on essence is not a statement on what is an original or inherent, fixed or metaphysical content of the object that can be uncovered. It is instead an acknowledgement of the malleability of how objects are constituted and the possibilities of the thing's coming to be as meant: its becoming.

While there are these possibilities of our constitution of world-as-world and objects in the world, the essences establish certain conditions for the world. Constitution of the world builds meaning and establishes and organizes meaning in particular ways. For example, we constitute the world as temporal and spatial. We also distinguish ourselves from others, my ego from your ego, based on personal space, internal time consciousness, and external points of reference. That is, there is a sense of own-ness, a sense of "what is specifically peculiar to me as ego, my *concrete* being as a monad, purely in myself and for myself,"¹³ that helps me distinguish me from you. Yet we experience the world as an intersubjective world, a world in which we are

¹² In the epoché, the world is no longer viewed on a straightforward basis. However, as Maurice Natanson reminds us, "reflecting and living continue, side by side in the life of consciousness" (Natanson 59). The epoché is not a denial or forgetting of the world surrounding the individual performing the epoché; the phenomenologist remains in the world as much as ever and does not separate her self from herself.

¹³ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 94, my emphasis.

aware of others¹⁴ experiencing the world and others experiencing us. While others are objects for me in the world, they are also subjects for the world, that is, egos intending the world-as-world and the objects in it. This awareness of others constituting the world is a recognition of a “community of monads,” of me as monad and others as monads intending the world.¹⁵ With this acknowledgement of the universality¹⁶ of constitution and intended consciousness, there is also an acknowledgement of an intersubjective constitution of an object: what exists for me, also exists for you. We constitute more than just the existence of objects. We also constitute objects as having multiple sides that change shape based on our vantage point of the object; these retentive and protentive horizons, the approach and recession of objects based on a change in time and vantage point, come with our encounter with the world-as-world. A subject’s recognition of ownness, intersubjectivity, protentive and retentive horizons, and a space-time dimension points to an intentional process that is not chaotic.¹⁷ There are certain invariant structures of the life-world, then, that we use to make sense of the world of objects; we cannot choose as if we could constitute otherwise.

In “whatever way we may be conscious of the world,” our consciousness is directed.¹⁸ Husserl refers to this directedness as intentionality.^{19,20} Perceptions point to something, regardless of how, why or what they point to. Thinking is always thinking of something. Willing is a willing of something. Imagining is imagining something. Dreaming is dreaming of

¹⁴ That is, other than me, alien to me, not-me.

¹⁵ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 107.

¹⁶ This universality is not a metaphysical claim. It is, instead, part of the explanation of the intentional components implicit in the experienced and experiential world that exists for us.

¹⁷ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 54

¹⁸ Husserl, *Crisis*, p.108.

¹⁹ This intension is not a statement on motivation for action, but a statement on action having a correlate, a target.

²⁰ Husserl refers to this intended object and intended world as noema and the intentional act as noesis. The noesis is understood in its *active* relation to the noema.

something. The way in which we know that the world is real is by intending it as real. The notion of our intending consciousness underscores that an individual is action: a dynamic force that gives objects their object-ness and makes sense of the world as world and of its phenomena. As Husserl states, “[I]t is to this or that object that we pay attention, according to our interest; with them we deal actively in different ways; through our acts they are ‘thematic’ objects.”²¹ These objects have a meaning because we intend them as such; they are meant objects.

This intended-meaning radically breaks with the prejudices of the so-called objective sciences. Positive science’s understanding of the world comes from the notion that the world is there, with its natural laws and uniform ways of behaving that are waiting to be uncovered and, once discovered, easily predicted. This belief of the world-as-found emphasizes the world’s a priori existence, an existence outside of the individual, the discoverer, as well as the self’s passive receptivity to this already existing world. Husserl calls this belief in the underlying persistence of the world distinct from consciousness the natural attitude.²²

Transcendental consciousness calls into question the natural attitude and its unexpressed presupposition of the surrounding world as taken for granted as valid and as existing before and outside of the individual. As Husserl contends, “[T]he objective-scientific method rests upon a never questioned, deeply concealed subjective ground whose philosophical elucidation will for the first time reveal the true meaning of the accomplishments of positive science and, correlatively the true ontic meaning of the object world—precisely as a transcendental-subjective meaning.”²³ Thus, positivism is entrenched in naïve objectivity.²⁴ By naïve, Husserl means that an individual relies unreflectively on an empirically real world. Facts and figures equal Truth.

²¹ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 108.

²² Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 143.

²³ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 100.

²⁴ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 143.

Husserl's comment on the naïveté of objectivism is not a comment on objectivism's findings as right or wrong, but it is a statement that objectivism is misguided: objectivism overlooks itself as an achievement of intersubjective, intending consciousness. Husserl's view, however, is not anti-science or a denial of the positive existence of the real. Rather, it is a challenge to how science is done. As Natanson notes, phenomenology does not "deny or relinquish the empirical but fastens on it as intentional object."²⁵ Meaning of the world and its ability to be an a priori given comes from the ways in which the world has been intended. As Husserl describes it, objective science is "an accomplishment remaining within *subjectivity*."²⁶ Objectivity from and for subjectivity: Objectivity is a product of the acting, intending individual. Its object-ness and the notion of unbiased neutrality in a positivistic approach comes from the subject intending it as object with said features and with said means of analysis. The phenomenological interest in the object is not an interest on its appearance or its realness, but it is an interest because of what is intended and how consciousness constitutes. Rather than facts and figures of science's positivism, phenomenology offers a new foundation for inquiry and for objectivity. This "new ground" is the ground of a subject's intending and constituting consciousness.²⁷

Remember, though, one's consciousness is not an isolated consciousness. In recognizing intersubjectivity at the transcendental level and constitution of objects as there for everyone, there is a recognition of other individuals being in the world-as-world. Husserl's subjectivism is neither a solipsism nor a relativism. However, Husserl's project does not offer an explanation, however, of these intersubjective relations at a social or discursive level. Additionally, his exposition and critique of naïve objectivity remains only at either the transcendental or the broad

²⁵ Natanson, p. 185.

²⁶ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 95.

²⁷ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 100.

historical (e.g. Husserl's discussion of Galileo's mathematization of nature) level. While Husserl explains this history as a movement or as an evolution, the individual is not described in history nor in relation to the political nor with a concept of power or of politics.

Enter Foucault. Foucault's genealogical period offers an analysis of social and power relations that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology does not, an explanation that grounds individuals in the sociopolitical world and further reveals and destabilizes sedimented knowledges and that helps elucidate what to call into question about ourselves in the epoché.

Foucauldian Post-Structuralism: *Describing the Human in Relation to and Within Social Totalities*

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French social historian and philosopher who interrogated what is taken for granted as known and, in the process, shakes up the present order of every day situations, scientific, linguistic, historic and academic frameworks of thought, and individuals' beliefs in these theories and concepts of how the world operates. Scholars traditionally divide his work into two periods: his archeological period and his genealogical period. In the first period, Foucault looked at the shifts in épistèmes and what makes these shifts and knowledge possible, while in the latter he was occupied with lineage and development of these discourses in their relation to power and truth. There is also a third section in his later works that is less often focused on in secondary literature, but which I contend is highly significant: his turn to the active subject.

Archaeology

Foucault's archaeological period is a dig beneath the surface of everyday knowledge about how certain disciplines work.²⁸ In his major archeological work, *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault describes his archaeological move as an inquiry into the conditions of knowledge, what makes knowledge possible, in order to understand the changes in épistèmes—systems of knowledge or discourses on a particular topic. Tracking the evolutions in linguistics, economics, and biology, Foucault describes how discursive change is “an event in the order of knowledge.”²⁹ As these disciplines gain more knowledge about their particular topic, there are shifts in rules about ordering, logic, and representation that couple, uncouple, and re-couple different knowledges. Rather than a body of knowledge, a seemingly smooth, continuous and “unified epistemological field” within the discipline, there are, Foucault says, many discontinuities— a movement in which interests were modified, shifted, and redistributed and different discursive regimes arose.³⁰ These changes are “wrinkles traced for the first time upon the enlightened face of knowledge” in this archaeological dig.³¹ In the process of these breaks and reconnections of knowledge, these changes establish a hierarchy for what is more real, more necessary, and/or more true. This concentration on broad movements within disciplines in order to show discursive shifts and (re)ordering puts forth the notion: order within disciplines is open to change, and if change is “an event in the order of knowledge,” then knowledge is also open to change. Foucault's archaeological period, thus, focused on épistèmes, not on the individual or

²⁸ This period traditionally includes his large works *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

²⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 345.

³⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 246.

³¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 238.

the specific dynamics within or between these épistèmes, in order to show the uninterrogated disruptions in knowledge and order that make possible our knowledge of these disciplines.

Genealogy: Discipline

But what is the motivation for these discursive changes? Foucault addresses this question in his later works, in his genealogical period,³² while also continuing his archaeological inquiry into conditions for knowledge and discourse. Discourses are the foundation of society: society, objects and the idea of an individual are all subjected products of these discourses. As Foucault has already shown, they come into being through discourse, rather than preceding discourse. But there is more to just naming the multiplicity of discourses. Foucault now realizes the impossibility of neutrality within discourses and their functions is the catalyst for Foucault's genealogical shift. Foucault uses the creation and evolution of specific knowledges and rationalities to map and critique historical conflicts within discourses and to critique established authorities and knowledges. In this genealogical turn, Foucault establishes that there is a dynamic of power and will to truth that drives these knowledges and formations of discourse foundational to society.

Rather than describing power as binaries of the ruler-ruled or of oppressor-oppressed or affirming theories of power as jurisprudence, sovereignty, right, or economics, Foucault's analysis establishes power as a "complex strategical situation" in society.³³ A web of interconnecting, fluid forces that go over-around-and-through society, power is everywhere. It is an immanent force "not because it embraces everything but because it comes from

³² This period traditionally includes his large works, *The Order of Discourse* (1970), *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (1976). It also includes the interview "Truth and Power" that Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino conducted (1976).

³³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 93.

everywhere.”³⁴ To look for different centers of power is impossible. Power exists in relations, in its exercise. From this relational attribute of power, it becomes clear that there are necessary interactions between individuals. The infinite and minute interactions, social relations, are built up to form what we know as society. Power is rooted in this social nexus. But power is not an institutional structure or personal strength, nor can it be acquired or seized. Power does not result from the direct choice of the individual. Instead, power is a relational and productive force based on discursive definitions, definitions with their own aims and truths. Thus, power is not something that one “has” or “possesses.” Rather, it is the name for a dynamic that occurs between and among agents, be they individuals, institutions, or states.

One of the ways in which mechanisms of power function is by individuating subjects in immediate, everyday life. As Foucault writes, this form of power “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him.”³⁵ Power makes individuals subjects. It is also a form of power that has a link with a discursive truth about a subject and a discursive desire and motivation, a will, to need a truth.

Foucault analyzes the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) in order to illustrate how discursive practices operate and how power disciplines and shapes the individual. Replacing the previous techniques of torture and punishment, the Panopticon is a discipline structure, a prison structure with tiered, singular cells surrounding a central guard tower. In the Panopticon, the guard can see into the cells, but the prisoner cannot see into the tower. In this method, the

³⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 93.

³⁵ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 781. While this quote crosses from the active subjectivity to the genealogical period of his works, it is an apt description of his genealogical description of the subject in relation to power. It also shows how genealogical imperatives continue in his move to active subjectivity.

crowd of inmates is easily numbered and categorized. As Foucault states, “Invisibility is a guarantee of order”³⁶: the permanent *possibility* of being watched, of being seen doing something s/he is not supposed to, keeps the prisoner’s behavior in line. S/he becomes the gaze, and in the process, s/he subjects his/herself to this unverifiable control without direct force. Privileges are given for “good” behavior, a controlled conduct that conforms to the ideals of what a prisoner should be in his/her process of reform to become a “functional” citizen. By internalizing what a “proper” citizen is, s/he disciplines his/herself to a mode of behavior. No longer is the authority a single executioner on a public scaffold who inflicts bodily pain, but now the authority is an automated mechanism, which includes the individual, that restricts bodily movement while also prescribing a regimen for the non-corporal truths—drives, aptitudes, potentialities—of the person. In this way, the Panopticon enacts and enforces discipline—not only by disciplining the individual directly, but also by teaching the individual to discipline herself.

Foucault’s analysis of the Panopticon is not simply an analysis of the prison. It is also an analysis of the modern individual and the society that shapes her. The methods of the Panopticon filter into the modes of society and its lateral controls because of the inescapable, all-encompassing discourses—a variety of disciplines, each with a unique know-how about the behavior and capacity that it assigns to an individual.³⁷ Within the discourses, Foucault explains, “the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process.”³⁸ Discourses create a rigid knowledge of the subject in categorizing and defining the topic of discussion—the criteria of the *supposed to be* in how the topic is organized and the individual is identified. The subtle utilization of knowledge about the individual codifies

³⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 200.

³⁷ While it is important to note that the Panoptic scheme is not the only way in which procedures of power operate in society, it does explain productive power in social relations.

³⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 224.

what is normal and natural. Discourses separate out the multiplicity, characterizing and classifying individuals around a discourse-defined truth, qualifying and ranking individuals on how close they fit the presupposed norm. The more an individual conforms, the more s/he aligns with “his [or her] ‘true’ name, ‘true’ place.”³⁹ This sorting is permanent in that it is always present, but malleable in that its form changes from institution to institution and discourse to discourse. The institutions’ central hub of ideals—their guard tower—are open to conforming individuals to inspect and to obtain a view from this point of inspection. Individuals presume that this access is democratically accessible rather than seeing the tyranny of this technique because of the process of normalization.

This normative process is a product of individuals unwittingly subjecting and disciplining themselves to different discursive ideals. The prospect of someone seeing him/her counter the prescribed notion, not the punishment itself, becomes the method of surveillance. This mode keeps an individual in compliance before s/he ever acts contrary to the norm. Eventually, a code of normalcy, a codified truth about the subject, develops; individuals have a standard to measure themselves against. Through comparison and normalization rather than punishment and law, this mode of power gains its authority. These discourse-determined norms are then believed to be natural for oneself and for others—their existence, evolution, and construction become invisible. This form of discipline is pervasive: it extends across modern society. As Foucault pointedly remarks,

Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labor, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?⁴⁰

³⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 198.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 227-228.

Genealogy: Power-Knowledge

Recall that this pervasiveness is due to internalization of the norm. This acceptance of the norm as natural and already there subjects behavior—thought and action—to the norm and gives power to this knowledge, forming what Foucault calls the dyad “power-knowledge.” In the power-knowledge dyad of discourse, Foucault explains, “the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement.”⁴¹ S/he is the topic of discussion and a particular discourse directs what s/he can or cannot say or do. There are certain prescriptive rules and discourse-defined truths in which she operates. Her subjectivity: S/he is subjected to discourse as well as a subject of discourse. With the increase of discursive know-how and normalization, concepts of a topic become rigidified, stuck to a particular time, age, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. The construction of the norm as well as the role of knowledge and power relations are invisible. They are perceived as given, as already-there. Acting in accordance with these veiled ideals, individuals acquire another mode of subjection, another mode of subjectivity.

This discursive making of subjects is a form, or technique, of power. Rather than a universal form or passive object that can be possessed or exchanged, power is a productive force that functions in multiple ways and in multiple relations between and among individual subjects, institutions, systems, and discourses. There is a mechanism of power that is located and produced through the minute and even mundane interrelations within society and woven into discourse. The exercise of power is rooted in this social nexus, not reconstituted above or outside of these systems and discourses. Power acts upon actions; this emphasis on the action in power means that there is a perpetual possibility of reversal. Discourses and techniques of power within them are malleable, not fixed.

⁴¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 61.

Discourses and the techniques of power within them are thus dynamic. As Foucault reminds us, “Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution.”⁴² There is more than one objective in each strategy as well as more than one strategy in each objective. Regardless of technique or its dispersion, the strategy is not homogeneous on all social levels. For example, the discourse that proclaims sex as reproductive has different imperatives for race, class, gender, sexual orientation and age.

In noting this multiplicity and dynamism, Foucault challenges a discourse’s mentality of discovering a transcendental Truth and achieving Rationality. Instead, he asserts, there are many *rationalities* because there are many discourses and techniques within discourses. He contends that the word ‘rationalization’ is dangerous and what is needed is an analysis of “specific rationalities rather than always invoking the progress of rationalization in general.”⁴³ Because of power-truth interplay, certain knowledges have been lost, discredited, buried or rejected. Due to this subjected knowledge, there must be a focus on local, specific, and immediate knowledges and their infinite mechanisms of power and its effects.

Foucault places the subject in relation to power. The individual is the most immediate site that power relations have their effect. Power relationships are rooted in the social nexus. This model of power centers itself on the individual and operates through an intricate interplay of power and truth. The analysis of power looks at *how* subjects are gradually constituted through discourse and the power-truth mechanisms within them. The individual is the subject to and of discourse, an effect of power. This productive power conceptualizes power as a force within social relations and a force predicated on knowledge of the subject, the formation of what it

⁴² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 99

⁴³ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 779-780. This quote is appropriate here in genealogy even if it crosses the genealogical-subjectivity split of Foucault’s periods.

means to be a subject as well as being subjected to this knowledge. By focusing on the productions and techniques of power, it is apparent that the analysis of power “cannot take place simply at the level of ideological abstraction, but instead must view the *concrete* and *myriad* mechanisms through which power operates.”⁴⁴ Ideals are grounded in socially-created perceptions and their political push-pull.

The genealogical period, then, focused on discipline and power-knowledge in order to show not only discursive shifts, like his archeological period’s focus, but also the lack of neutrality in these shifts. Power is an underlying dynamic that arises from social interaction, a force that individuates and normalizes in order to discipline individuals and to teach individuals how to discipline themselves to certain discursively defined norms. Through the increase of subjection of thought and action to a particular norm, power is given to this knowledge at the expense of other knowledges.

Active Subjectivity

You will recall that in his archeological period, Foucault’s focus was on epistémès, while in the genealogical period his focus was on power, knowledge, and discourses. By the end of the genealogical period, however, Foucault finds himself talking more and more about the individual qua agent. There is a move within and after Foucault’s genealogical work toward a focus on the individual’s agency that addresses these questions: Who or what is enacting these power relations and putting discourse into action? Who or what is internalizing these norms in order for them to become invisible and viewed as already-there? As Foucault “clarifies”⁴⁵ in “The Subject

⁴⁴ Summers, p. 26, my italics.

⁴⁵ But is it really a “clarification”? Or is he just back peddling to save his project? While I will leave this question to you as the reader to decide, I think it is important to note his adamant

and Power,” the aim of his works is not discourse nor power, “but the subject which is the general theme” of his research.⁴⁶ Foucault realizes that he reaches a barrier in genealogy because of his inattention to the subject qua agent. Rather than insisting on discourses as existing as separate entities apart from the subject, he reforms his genealogical critique to include individuals *enacting* and *engaging in* power relations and *challenging* discourses. The individual is no longer discourse’s marionette. The active agent that does more than just passively receive these discourses, be a discursive subject, or be subjected to discourse by discourse. She has an active role—an active subjectivity.⁴⁷

In noting this always-present characteristic of discourses, Foucault claims that individuals can and need to challenge these discourses in order to mobilize a response to suffocating discourses. Instead of unquestioningly aligning to a certain discourse, a “critical interrogation on the present and on ourselves” is possible.⁴⁸ Awareness of power relations and discourses enables an individual to counter the authority that claims knowledge; to understand the historical struggles through which these power relations that constitute her individuality have come to exist; and to recognize her inter-enmeshment and function in power relations. Foucault challenges: Envision new ways of being individuals. Individuals must call into question the very basic power relations that form the foundation of the social nexus and strive to analyze what is below the surface of everyday “rationality”—the motivations, the power struggles and the history of the local knowledge—while understanding that there is never “access to any complete

aversion to the subject in his archaeological period and his introduction of the subject in his later works and his insistence here in “The Subject of Power” that the subject is and has always been his main theme.

⁴⁶ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 778.

⁴⁷ His large works *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2-3 (1984) and his later essays, including “What is Enlightenment?,” “The Subject and Power,” “The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” and “Subjectivity and Truth” are included in this period.

⁴⁸ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” p. 132.

or definite knowledge...” of an individual’s capacities, his/her role in society, the social institutions, and the ultimate function of society.⁴⁹ Individuals cannot know what type of situations will arise or when they will occur. No comprehensive cure-all can be guaranteed. An individual can only open her eyes as much as possible to the panopticism that surrounds her and push against her limits towards “undefined work of freedom.”⁵⁰ In order to open up spaces for an unspecified, undefined freedom, s/he can only squirm to create twist-and-shout latitude within old discourses, taking each situation separately and realizing that what works today in a particular situation may not work tomorrow. Although discourses categorize the world, it is possible to challenge existing discourses and create spaces for personal liberation albeit still *within* a discourse and power relations. Discourses confine, but they also free.

Foucault and Husserl: A Productive Crisis Towards a Complex, Active Subject Grounded in the Sociopolitical

The Turn to the Active Subject

While the subject tries to work to find latitude in discourses for her undefined work of freedom, Foucault’s explanation of the subject in relation to the discursive power-knowledge-truth trio gives the individual a passive dimension in which s/he receives an already-there discourse in which s/he is already enmeshed. As Béatrice Han explains, the Foucauldian analysis of subjectivity “appears to oscillate in a contradictory manner, between a definition of subjectivity as ‘self-creation,’ on the one hand, and on the other hand, the need, in order to understand the games of truth through which recognition itself operates, back to the practices of

⁴⁹ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” p. 127.

⁵⁰ Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” p. 126.

power of which subjects are not masters and are usually not even aware.”⁵¹ This tension points to a lack of foundation—while trying to historicize the subject in order to show that Husserl’s transcendental intended consciousness was not so transcendental after all, Foucault fell back on an active subject.

Foucault’s turn to the active subject is important to note because of its large break with his previous writings and critiques of phenomenology’s subject. In his archeological work, Foucault critiques Husserl for being too transcendental and for trying to get to an a priori origin while also not recognizing phenomenology as a discourse. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes that phenomenology raises “the ground of experience, the sense of being, the lived horizon of all our knowledge to the level of our discourse.”⁵² Phenomenology is unreflective about its discursive location, and it does not take into account its historical and political situation. Later on in his works, Foucault further critiques the notion of a constituting subject. As Foucault writes in one of his genealogical interviews, “Truth and Power” (1976):

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.⁵³

For Foucault, the idea of a constituting subject either separates the subject from historical political dimensions or neglects the many ways in which notions of the subject are discursively developed.

⁵¹ Han, p. 172.

⁵² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 299.

⁵³ Foucault, “Truth and Power,” p. 117.

Foucault, however, misreads the meaning of origin, history, and constituting subject in Husserl. While the intended consciousness of the subject is a foundation, the origin for Husserl does not point to the genesis of History nor does it prescribe a fixed mode of being or a specific prescriptive “supposed to” of doing, acting, or being for the subject. Intended consciousness, instead, describes how we make sense of the world, where all notions of even the world-as-world arise. Given the intended quality of consciousness there is not an “empty sameness”; there is always *something* that consciousness is directed towards, and it is not always the same something. Likewise, even though pointing to certain invariant structures in the life-world, constitution of a meant world is not static: it is a very dynamic process, a process in which an ego is continually making and giving sense to the world. This fashioning is a cultural and historical process *but* the subject is still the contributing agent.⁵⁴ Knowledge of the subject does not precede discourse. But the subject puts the discourse and its political dimensions in motion.

Foucault’s move to the active subject acknowledges that the subject is the mover and shaker in discourse. This shift, however, occurred at the end of his philosophical career. Soon after his turn to the active subject, he died, and there is not a clear indication of the direction that he would take this subject. While it is speculation that Foucault would eventually have moved to a more Husserlian phenomenology of the subject, his move to the subject does point to Foucault’s realization that even if we are constituted, we do have a “why” in seeking an “undefined work of freedom.” Otherwise, what point would there be to our focus on local struggles? There is a need for a subject who is acting and constituting subject rather than one who is simply constituted in understanding power, discourse, local knowledges, and making sense of the world.

⁵⁴ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 133.

Not only will an active subject offer insight into the “undefined work of freedom” and an interrogation into local struggles, the active subject also prevents masking subjugated knowledges. In relying strictly on a constituted subject, Foucault hides subjugated knowledges he seeks to uncover. As Rubin asserts, Foucault undermines “the authority of individual speaking subjects and thereby plays into patterns of domination that work against the possibility of marginalized subjects using their knowledge of their own subject positions to speak counter-discursively.”⁵⁵ Without a speaking subject, what is known about a certain topic or about a particular individual is generalized, subsumed in another discourse, and covered over again rather than being seen as its own genealogical layer. A focus on an active subject, even if it is perhaps not exactly the constituting subject that *Husserl* seeks, permits these submerged discourses to be voiced and dominant ones to be challenged—to continue Foucault’s call to seek “the undefined work of freedom” and to focus on local knowledges. An active subject points to the subject as agent in power relations, discourse formations, and normalizing truths.

A New Foundation: Turning to Husserl

Although Foucault encourages an active subject in twist-and-shout latitude in discourses and a genealogical approach to local knowledges, he does not give a new foundation. For Foucault, discourses are permanent—there is no escaping discourse. There is only moving through the discursive sludge to more discursive gunk. While Husserl does not try to simplify the mess, Husserl does provide a new foundation that does not fall into the trap of blindly accepting the already-there that Foucault warns against. There is an acknowledgment that the new foundation does not have complete access to Knowledge and Wisdom. All knowledge is not to

⁵⁵ Rubin, p. 264.

be found in Husserl's writings alone, but Husserl does establish a methodological and analytic foundation that works in dialogue with other perspectives,⁵⁶ such as Foucault's.

Rather than focusing on knowledge separate from the subject, phenomenology insists on the subject's primacy in the formation of knowledge. It is concerned with how humans know the world, not for knowledge itself, but for knowing what the world means to us, the world as meant. Connecting knowledge to the knower, phenomenology inserts the human at the center of knowing.

Focusing on the centrality of the subject, this new basis for inquiry also gives an alternative to positive objectivity: objectivity from and for subjectivity. Foucault, too, rejects a dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge as *the only* way to acquire knowledge about something: he inverts the positivist approach that a definable, ultimate truth is possible or that it can be arrived at through an objective analysis. Rationality becomes rationalities. Knowledge becomes knowledges. He shows disciplines as lacking scientificity, as positively unscientific, but he does not critique science's positivism. As Rudi Visker points out, "Foucault can only dispute the scientific ideal of the human sciences by basing his arguments... on a specific conception of what constitutes the scientificity of science: the difference between the position of the human and the other sciences (...) is for Foucault an argument—the only argument—which leads to the direct conclusion that they are unscientific in character."⁵⁷ For Foucault, the human in the human sciences is not properly studied by scientific standards. But what about these standards? These standards are not compatible with the multiplicity of knowledges that Foucault reveals for they endorse the ability to find an origin, an a priori ahistorical Knowledge of how the world operates that Foucault emphatically rejects. Along with endorsing a genealogical approach that

⁵⁶ Phenomenology Roundtable, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Rudi Visker, p. 42.

unroots the concept of Rationality and Knowledge in tracing discursive changes and in uncovering subjected knowledges, he needs to put forth an alternative to positivism.

Phenomenology offers this alternative. The notion of objectivity from subjectivity permits not only a focus on the active subject, but also accounts for the notion of knowledges. This description of objectivity allows for many concepts of the world-as-meant, meanings given to the world by the subject as well as what the subject knows of the world. The multiplicity spills forth.

As part of this active subject-centered methodological alternative to positivism, the phenomenological task does not dismiss notions of the world nor does it stop investigating these notions simply because the notions are discursive. As Fryer states, “In its investigation of the lifeworld, phenomenology also investigates how experiences, even ones that are more properly discursive products than keys to the transcendental, shape our worldview and experiences of the world.”⁵⁸ While Foucault disrupts notions and points to their discursiveness, he also implicitly rejects any meaning beyond the fact of their discursiveness and stops his investigation after illuminating their discursiveness. Husserl, however, focuses on the world-as-meant for the subject, and in the process, opens up understandings of the world and grounds objective science in the life-world. Instead of a finite task that ends with the revealing of discursiveness, the phenomenological method is an infinite task.

More De-Sedimenting: What Foucault Adds

Part of the difficult albeit fruitful infinite phenomenological task is the continuous reflection that the epoché entails. Husserl calls upon the inquirer to bracket what she knows, to

⁵⁸ Fryer, p. 156.

reflect upon and question what is known, and to break down firmly rooted knowledges. The epoché is difficult to achieve because of the impulse to hold on to positivistic proof in science, in history, and the testimony of others—the natural attitude. Natanson points out that “the performance of phenomenology may be described in the natural attitude, but it cannot be grasped in that way.”⁵⁹ But the epoché is also difficult to achieve if the inquirer does not know about what to inquire. How do we know what and to what extent to call into question about ourselves? Foucault’s analysis offers some suggestions.

With Foucault’s analysis of power and social relations, there is a deeper explanation of what reflection in the Husserlian epoché involves. In putting forth the notion of subjugated knowledges and the description of power’s role and character, Foucault further reveals and destabilizes sedimented knowledges, a destabilization that helps elucidate what to call into question about ourselves in the epoché.

The relational aspect of power shows that social interaction and intersubjectivity entail power dynamics: “what is” about the world involves more than tacit agreement. While, in Husserlian terms, we both intersubjectively know that the other endows meaning to objects and that there may be multiple meanings given to objects, Husserl does not expand on how certain meanings take on more significance or more value than others—the hierarchy and ordering of meaning, of how things become “what is.” There are discursive struggles for legitimacy and normality. With the Foucauldian dynamic of power, power as productive and relational, it becomes evident that even agreed upon meanings have certain albeit malleable strategies and objectives.

⁵⁹ Natanson, p. 75.

This multiplicity of techniques and plurality of knowledge illustrate that there is a naïveté in limiting our exploration of what it means to know and to uniquely know something. Historically, individually, and collectively, relational power and discursive battles couple and recouple what we know, shifts that have become invisible as they discipline us and we discipline ourselves to their normality and take their for truth about the world. From subjugated knowledges it is apparent that some knowledges are sacrificed at the expense of others. Subjugated knowledges point to the need to continually seek different layers of knowledge about something: To interrogate what is seemingly natural, normal, or always there. To question what is considered more right or more true.

Rather than operate solely Husserl's transcendental level of intersubjectivity, Foucault illustrates the dynamic push-pull in establishing certain meanings over others. With this complex push-pull, it is evident that are there more layers to bracket in the epoché. Through Foucauldian aspects of power and subjected knowledges, more about what we know is called into question and bracketed. Sedimented knowledge becomes unstuck and possibilities open up.

Husserl with Foucault: *A Human-Centered Notion of Enduring Constitutions*

The subject qua agent gives a new dimension to sociopolitical interactions, knowledges, and institutions that Foucault's explanation and Husserl's epoché together expose. The primacy of the concrete subject points to how power relations, discourses, and the will to truth come through the subject's constitution: as the subject's formation of the world-as-world, the world as containing discourses, politics, and truths. Notions of sex and gender as well as gender roles, for example, come from the individual constituting the world as having these categories. But the world *becomes* the world through the intersubjective, shared constitution. The world becomes the

world-as-world as the subject in a “community of monads” lives out structures of thought, builds institutions and ideas of the world, and exchanges and shares this information with others. These institutions, discourses, and norms are *enduring* constitutions from the *dynamics* of sociopolitical relations, the effects of power relations and the inter-constituting subjective world. Constituting in an intersubjective world entails power relations; not a oppressor-oppressed dualism, but power based on discursive battles and social interactions. This inter-tangling of power, ideas, constitutions, and a plurality of intending consciousness yields a complexity of the world and of the subject beyond our wildest imagination.

From this Husserl-Foucauldian perspective, a focus on the complex active-centered subject emerges. Foucault’s genealogy grounds individuals in the sociopolitical world, how we are *concretely* in an intersubjective world rather than focusing on how we are *supposed* to be. Husserl points to the primacy of the meaning-endowing transcendental yet *concrete* ego, not a metaphysical or ideal ego. Combining hermeneutic and existential, *concrete* dimensions of being in the world, Foucault’s turn to the active subject and Husserl’s intended consciousness returns the inquirer to the nuclear source of his/her activity. Husserl grounds the inquiry⁶⁰ in the primacy of the active subject while Foucault explains sociopolitical dynamics at work within this subjectivity. Together, there is a recognition of the intersubjective power dynamics at work and enduring constitutions that result from this intersubjectivity. But this query also leaves the human at the center and stimulates persistent critical inquiry into sedimented layers of knowledge.

The desedimenting of knowledge about the world, a combination of the Husserlian epoché and the Foucauldian genealogy of power relations and subjugated knowledges, applies to anyone wanting answers to understanding the subject and the intersubjective world in which she

⁶⁰ Natanson, p.54

is enmeshed while realizing that unambiguous answers are not necessarily guaranteed. Husserl remarks, “In short, we carry out an epoché in regard to all objective theoretical interests, all aims and activities belong to us as objective scientists or even simply as [ordinary] people desirous of [this kind of] knowledge.”⁶¹ We inquire because we are interested in what the subject has to say about her being in the world and experiencing the world, complete with sociopolitical dimensions.

Our query about the human and her understanding of the world is objectivity from and for subjectivity. This recognition of the active subject does not try to universalize experience nor give a metaphysical property to the subject; rather, it points to the transcendental constituting ego in order to avoid Foucault’s impossibility in explaining discursive struggles from a constituted ego. The world-as-meant is revealed: how subjects give meaning to the world-as-world and the objects in it as well as what meanings they give. These meanings may be shared or unique to each individual. The focus on de-sedimentation keeps the dynamism of these meanings while also pointing to the continuous and infinite task of the inquiry.

In the continual inquiry, there is also a new tenet: Embrace the ambiguity and live in the tension of this ambiguity. While there are certain invariant structures in the life-world, there are many variances in how or why the subject gives meaning to the world. In the inquiry, there is also not a final, ultimate arrival point for the inquiry other than the specific inquiry at a given moment. Rather than accepting the world on a straightforward acceptance or habitual manner and rather than stopping the inquiry at a discursive level, there is an inquiry into these experiences themselves and the manner in which they bestow sense. This move for a recognition of a complex, active subject in sociopolitical relations is neither “a skeptical nor a refusal of all

⁶¹ Husserl, *Crisis*, p. 135. (Translator’s [additions])

verified truth”⁶² nor does it “deny or relinquish the empirical.”⁶³ Instead, it demands that empirical and verified truth not rely on a “found” world in its approach to the subject.

Rather than repeating past sociological approaches to social interaction, as well as other academic disciplines about the human that rely on the strictly empirical, “found” world that undermines the activity of the subject, this new approach moves for certain characteristics of subjectivity that need to be taken into account in future sociological methods as well as projects within, between, and across academic disciplines of the human and about the human.⁶⁴ It centers on the active, meaning-endowing subject: the knower and the knowing are no longer divorced and meaning does not remain stagnant or fixed to a certain individual, institution, or group. This new way of understanding the subject points to certain attributes of the subject: the intentionality of her consciousness, her constant endowment of meaning to the world, her shared and enduring constitutions, her acknowledgement of others in the world, and the political push-pull in her interactions and bestowment of meaning on the world. Simultaneously, this approach to understanding the subject is engaged.⁶⁵ It gets into the grit of living, of the subject continually endowing and shifting meaning in the midst of a complex world and complex interactions. This approach constantly interrogates the notions of what is perceived as “there,” as an a priori truth or as a positivistic notion, so as not to fall back on the taken-for-granted, sedimented notions of the world and of the subject of which Husserl and Foucault both warn us. Husserl and Foucault in tandem points to a methodology that has a commitment to a process of *unfolding* and of

⁶² Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 781.

⁶³ Natanson, p. 185.

⁶⁴ That is, other regional ontologies, each with their own theme and place (Phenomenology Roundtable 2)

⁶⁵ An engagement rather than an application because application implies also that it can also be not applied or unapplied and hence distant from its connection to its intended-ness.

becoming rather than pointing to an ultimate, terminating end or an arrival point in the inquiry.⁶⁶

With the symbiosis of Husserl and Foucault arises:

An action-centered humanism:

An infinite task

A constant becoming.

⁶⁶ A caution against invoking progress: Progress implies an end to strive for, a destination point, an ultimate arrival. Progress in this fashion would re-invoke the positive notion that there is a final resting point. In avoiding words such as complete or comprehensive in describing this project for an active subject, I hope to avoid the insistence or the possibility of finding an ultimate or found truth as well as to avoid making a metaphysical claim on the essence of an individual.

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