Stirner and Foucault: Toward a Post-Kantian Freedom

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Introduction

Max Stirner and Michel Foucault are two thinkers not often examined together. However, it has been suggested that the long-ignored Stirner may be seen as a precursor to contemporary poststructuralist thought.[1] Indeed, there are many extraordinary parallels between Stirner's critique of Enlightenment humanism, universal rationality, and essential identities, and similar critiques developed by thinkers such as Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and others. However, the purpose of this paper is not merely to situate Stirner in the "poststructuralist" tradition, but rather to examine his thinking on the question of freedom, and to explore the connections here with Foucault's own development of the concept in the context of power relations and subjectivity. Broadly speaking, both thinkers see the classical Kantian idea of freedom as deeply problematic, as it involves essentialist and universal presuppositions which are themselves often oppressive. Rather, the concept of freedom must be rethought. It can no longer be seen in solely negative terms, as freedom from constraint, but must involve more positive notions of individual autonomy, particularly the freedom of the individual to construct new modes of subjectivity. Stirner, as we shall see, dispenses with the classical notion of freedom altogether and develops a theory of ownness [Eigneheit] to describe this radical individual autonomy. I suggest in this paper that such a theory of ownness as a non-essentialist form of freedom has many similarities with Foucault's own project of freedom, which involves a critical ethos and an aestheticization of the self. Indeed, Foucault questions the anthropological and universal rational foundations of the discourse of freedom, redefining it in terms of ethical practices.[2] Both Stirner and Foucault are therefore crucial to the understanding of freedom in a contemporary sense–they show that freedom can no longer be limited by rational absolutes and universal moral categories. They take the understanding of freedom beyond the confines of the Kantian project–grounding it instead in concrete and contingent strategies of the self.

Kant and Universal Freedom

In order to understand how this radical reformulation of freedom can take place, we must first see how the concept of freedom is located in Enlightenment thought. In this paradigm, the exercise of freedom is seen as an inherently rational property. According to Immanuel Kant, for instance, human freedom is presupposed by moral law that is rationally understood. In the Critique of Practical Reason, Kant seeks to establish an absolute rational ground for moral thinking beyond empirical principles. He argues that empirical principles are not an appropriate basis for moral laws because they do not allow their true universality to be established. Rather, morality should be based on a universal law–a categorical imperative–which can be rationally understood. For Kant, then, there is only one categorical imperative, which provides a foundation for all rational human action: "Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (38). In other words, the morality of an action is determined by

[1] See Koch.

[2] This rejection of the anthropological foundations of freedom is also discussed by Rajchman. Indeed Rajchman sees Foucault's project of freedom as an ethical attitude of continual questioning of the borders and limits of our contemporary experience–a freedom of philosophy as well as a philosophy of freedom. My discussion of Foucault's reconfiguration of the problematic of freedom in terms of concrete ethical strategies of the self may also be seen in this context.

whether or not it should become a universal law, applicable to all situations. Kant outlines three features of all moral maxims. Firstly, they must have the form of universality. Secondly, they must have a rational end. Thirdly, the maxims that arise from the autonomous legislation of the individual should be in accordance with a certain teleology of ends.

This last point has important consequences for the question of human freedom. For Kant, moral law is based on freedom–the rational individual freely chooses out of a sense of duty to adhere to universal moral maxims. Thus, for moral laws to be rationally grounded they cannot be based on any form of coercion or constraint. They must be freely adhered to as a rational act of the individual. Freedom is seen by Kant as an autonomy of the will–the freedom of the rational individual to follow the dictates of his own reason by adhering to these universal moral laws. This autonomy of the will, then, is for Kant the supreme principle of morality. He defines it as "that property of it by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of objects of volition)" (59). Freedom is, therefore, the ability of the individual to legislate for him or herself, free from external forces. However, this freedom of self-legislation must be in accordance with universal moral categories. Hence, for Kant, the principle of autonomy is: "Never choose except in such a way that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same volition as a universal law" (59). It would appear that there is a central paradox in this idea of freedom–you are free to choose as long as you make the right choice, as long as you choose universal moral maxims. However, for Kant there is no contradiction here because, although adherence to moral laws is a duty and an absolute imperative, it is still a duty that is freely chosen by the individual. Moral laws are rationally established, and because freedom can only be exercised by rational individuals, they will necessarily, yet freely, choose to obey these moral laws. In other words, an action is free only insofar as it conforms to moral and rational imperatives–otherwise it is pathological and therefore "unfree." In this way, freedom and the categorical imperative are not antagonistic but, rather, mutually dependent concepts. Individual autonomy, for Kant, is the very basis of moral laws.

> But that the principle of autonomy [...] is the sole principle of morals can be readily shown by mere analysis of concepts of morality; for by this analysis we find that its principle must be a categorical imperative, and that [the imperative] commands neither more nor less than this very autonomy. (59)

The Authoritarian Obverse

Nevertheless, it would seem that there is a hidden authoritarianism in Kant's formulation of freedom. While the individual is free to act in accordance with the dictates of his own reason, he

[3]See Lacan. In this essay, Lacan shows that the Law produces its own transgression, and that it can only operate through this transgression. The excess of Sade does not contradict the injunctions, laws, and categorical imperatives of Kant; rather, they are inextricably linked to it. Like Foucault's discussion of the "spirals" of power and pleasure, in which power produces the very pleasure it is seen to repress, Lacan suggests that the denial of enjoyment–embodied in Law, in the categorical imperative–produces its own form of perverse enjoyment, or jouissance as a surplus–le plus de jouir. Sade, according to Lacan, exposes this obscene enjoyment by reversing the paradigm: he turns this perverse pleasure into a law itself, into a sort of Kantian categorical imperative or universal principle: "Let us enunciate the maxim: 'I have the right of enjoyment over your body, anyone can say to me, and I will exercise this right, without any limit stopping me in the capriciousness of the exactions that I might have the taste to satiate'" (58). In this way the obscene pleasure of the Law that is unmasked in Kant is reversed into the Law of ob-

must nevertheless obey universal moral maxims. Kant's moral philosophy is a philosophy of the law. That is why Jacques Lacan was able to diagnose a hidden jouissance–or enjoyment in excess of the law–that attached itself to Kant's categorical imperative. According to Lacan, Sade is the necessary counterpart to Kant–the perverse pleasure that attaches itself to the law becomes, in the Sadeian universe, the law of pleasure.[3] The thing that binds Kantian freedom to the law is its attachment to an absolute rationality. It is precisely because freedom must be exercised rationally that the individual finds him or herself dutifully obeying rationally founded universal moral laws.

However, both Foucault and Stirner have called into question such universal rational and moral categories, which are central to Enlightenment thought. They contend that absolute categories of morality and rationality sanction various forms of domination and exclusion and deny individual difference. For Foucault, for instance, the centrality of reason in our society is based on the radical and violent exclusion of madness. People are still excluded, incarcerated, and oppressed because of this arbitrary division between reason and unreason, rationality and irrationality. Similarly, the prison system is based on a division between good and evil, innocence and guilt. The incarceration of the prisoner is made possible only through the universalization of moral codes. What must be challenged, for Foucault, are not only the practices of domination that are found in the prison, but also the morality which justifies and rationalizes these practices. The main focus of Foucault's critique of the prison is not necessarily on the domination within, but on the fact that this domination is justified on absolute moral grounds–the moral grounds that Kant seeks to make universal. Foucault wants to disrupt the "serene domination of Good over Evil" central to moral discourses and practices of power ("Intellectuals" 204-17).

It is this moral absolutism that Stirner is also opposed to. He sees morality as a "spook"–an abstract ideal that has been placed beyond the individual and held over him in an oppressive and alienating way. Morality and rationality have become "fixed ideas"–ideas that have come to be seen as sacred and absolute. A fixed idea, according to Stirner, is an abstract concept that governs thought–a discursively closed fiction that denies difference and plurality. They are ideas that have been abstracted from the world and continue to dominate the individual by comparing him or her to an ideal norm that is impossible to attain. In other words, Kant's project of taking moral maxims out of the empirical world and into a transcendental realm where they would apply universally, would be seen by Stirner as a project of alienation and domination. Kant's invocation of absolute obedience to universal moral maxims Stirner would see as the worst possible denial of individuality. For Stirner, the individual is paramount, and anything which purports to apply to or speak for everyone universally is an effacement of individual uniqueness and difference. The individual is plagued by these abstract ideals, these apparitions that are not of his own creation and are imposed on him, confronting him with impossible moral and rational standards. As we shall see, moreover, the individual for Stirner is not a stable, fixed identity or essence–this would be just as much an idealist abstraction as the specters that oppress it. Rather, individuality may be seen here in terms similar to Foucault's–as a radically contingent form of subjectivity, an open strategy that one engages in to question and contest the confines of essentialism.

scene pleasure through Sade. As Zizek remarks in "Kant with (or against) Sade," the crucial insight of Lacan's argument here is not that Kant is a closet sadist, but rather that Sade is a "closet Kantian." That is, Sadean excess is taken to such an extreme that it becomes emptied of pleasure and takes the form of a cold-blooded, joyless universal Law.

The Critique of Essentialism

The exorcism that Stirner performs on this "spirit realm" of moral and rational absolutes is part of a radical critique of Enlightenment humanism and idealism. His "epistemological break" with humanism may be seen most clearly in his repudiation of Ludwig Feuerbach. In The Essence of Christianity, Feuerbach applied the notion of alienation to religion. Religion is alienating, according to Feuerbach, because it requires that man abdicate his essential qualities and powers by projecting them onto an abstract God beyond the grasp of humanity. For Feuerbach, the predicates of God were really only the predicates of man as a species being. God was an illusion, a fictitious projection of the essential qualities of man. In other words, God was a reification of human essence. Like Kant, who tried to transcend the dogmatism of metaphysics by reconstructing it on rational and scientific grounds, Feuerbach wanted to overcome religious alienation by re-establishing the universal rational and moral capacities of man as the fundamental ground for human experience. Feuerbach embodies the Enlightenment humanist project of restoring man to his rightful place at the center of the universe, of making the human the divine, the finite the infinite.

Stirner argues, however, that by seeking the sacred in "human essence," by positing an essential and universal subject and attributing to him certain qualities that had hitherto been attributed to God, Feuerbach has merely reintroduced religious alienation, placing the abstract concept of man within the category of the Divine. Through the Feuerbachian inversion man becomes like God, and just as man was debased under God, so the individual is debased beneath this perfect being, man. For Stirner, man is just as oppressive, if not more so, than God. Man becomes the substitute for the Christian illusion. Feuerbach, Stirner argues, is the high priest of a new universal religion–humanism: "The human religion is only the last metamorphosis of the Christian religion" (158). It is important to note here that Stirner's concept of alienation is fundamentally different from the Feuerbachian humanist understanding as alienation from one's essence. Stirner radicalizes the theory of alienation by seeing this essence as itself alienating. As I shall suggest, alienation in this instance may be seen more along the lines of a Foucauldian notion of domination–as a discourse that ties the individual to a certain subjectivity through the conviction that there lies within everyone an essence to be revealed.

According to Stirner, it is this notion of a universal human essence that provides the foundations for the absolutization of moral and rational ideas. These maxims have become sacred and immutable because they are now based on the notion of humanity, on man's essence, and to transgress them would be a transgression of this very essence. In this way the subject is brought into conflict with itself. Man is, in a sense, haunted and alienated by himself, by the specter of "essence" inside him: "Henceforth man no longer, in typical cases, shudders at ghosts outside him, but at himself; he is terrified at himself" (Stirner 41). So for Stirner, Feuerbach's "insurrection" has not overthrown the category of religious authority–it has merely installed man within it, reversing the order of subject and predicate. In the same way, we might suggest that Kant's metaphysical "insurrection" has not overthrown dogmatic structures of belief, but only installed morality and rationality within them.

While Kant wanted to take morality out of the domain of religion, founding it instead on reason, Stirner maintains that morality is only the old religious dogmatism in a new, rational guise: "Moral faith is as fanatical as religious faith!" (45). What Stirner objects to is not morality itself, but the fact that it has become a sacred, unbreakable law, and he exposes the will to power, the

cruelty and the domination behind moral ideas. Morality is based on the desecration, the breaking down of the individual will. The individual must conform to prevailing moral codes; otherwise, he becomes alienated from his essence. For Stirner, moral coercion is just as vicious as the coercion carried out by the state, only it is more insidious and subtle, since it does not require the use of physical force. The warden of morality is already installed in the individual's conscience. This internalized moral surveillance is also found in Foucault's discussion of Panopticism–in which he argues, reversing the classical paradigm, that the soul becomes the prison for the body (Foucault, Discipline 195-228).

A similar critique may be leveled at rationality. Rational truths are always held above individual perspectives, and Stirner argues that this is merely another way of dominating the individual. As with morality, Stirner is not necessarily against rational truth itself, but rather against the way it has become sacred, transcendental, and removed from the grasp of the individual, thus abrogating the individual's power. Stirner says: "As long as you believe in the truth, you do not believe in yourself, and you are a –servant, a–religious man" (312). Rational truth, for Stirner, has no real meaning beyond individual perspectives–it is something that can be used by the individual. Its real basis, as with morality, is power.

So while, for Kant, moral maxims are rationally and freely obeyed, for Stirner they are a coercive standard, based on an alienating notion of human "essence" that is forced upon the individual. Moreover, they become the basis for practices of punishment and domination. For instance, in response to the Enlightenment idea that crime was a disease to be cured rather than a moral failing to be punished, Stirner argues that curative and punitive strategies were just two sides of the same old moral prejudice. Both strategies rely on a universal norm which must be adhered to: "'curative means' always announces to begin with that individuals will be looked on as 'called' to a particular 'salvation' and hence treated according to the requirements of this 'human calling'" (213). Is not the individual, for Kant, also "called" to a particular "salvation" when he is required to do his duty and obey moral codes? Is not the Kantian categorical imperative also a "human calling" in this sense? In other words, Stirner's critique of morality and rationality may be applied to Kant's categorical imperative. For Stirner, although moral maxims may be ostensibly freely followed, they still entail a hidden coercion and authoritarianism. This is because they have become universalized in the Kantian formulation as absolute norms which leave little room for individual autonomy, and which one cannot transgress, because to do so would be to go against one's own rational, universal "human calling."

Stirner's critique of morality and its relation to punishment has striking similarities with Foucault's own writings on punishment. For Stirner, as we have seen, there is no difference between cure and punishment–the practice of curing is a reapplication of the old moral prejudices in a new "enlightened" guise:

> Curative means or healing is only the reverse side of punishment, the theory of cure runs parallel with the theory of punishment; if the latter sees in an action a sin against right, the former takes it for a sin of the man against himself, as a falling away from his health. (213)

This is very similar to Foucault's argument about the modern formula of punishment–that medical and psychiatric norms are only the old morality in a new guise. While Stirner considers the effect of such forms of moral hygiene on the individual conscience, where Foucault's focus

is more on the materiality of the body, the formula of cure and punishment is the same: it is the notion of what is properly ”human” that authorizes a whole series of exclusions, disciplinary practices, and restrictive moral and rational norms. For Foucault, as well as for Stirner, punishment is made possible by making something sacred or absolute–in the way that Kant makes morality into a universal law. There are several points to be made here. Firstly, both Stirner and Foucault see moral and rational discourses as problematic–they often exclude, marginalize, and oppress those who do not live up to the norms implicit in these discourses. Secondly, both thinkers see rationality and morality as being implicated in power relations, rather than constituting a critical epistemological point outside power. Not only are these norms made possible by practices of power, through the exclusion and domination of the other, but they also, in turn, justify and perpetuate practices of power, such as those found in the prison and asylum.

Thirdly, both thinkers see morality as having an ambiguous relation to freedom. While Stirner argues that on the surface moral and rational norms are freely adhered to, they nevertheless entail an oppression over ourselves–a self-domination–that is far more insidious and effective than straightforward coercion. In other words, by conforming to universally prevailing moral and rational norms, the individual abdicates his own power and allows himself to be dominated. Foucault also unmasks this hidden domination of the moral and rational norm that is found behind the calm visage of human freedom. The classical Enlightenment idea of freedom, Foucault argues, allowed only pseudo-sovereignty. It claims to hold sovereign ”consciousness (sovereign in the context of judgment, but subjected to the necessities of truth), the individual (a titular control of personal rights subjected to the laws of nature and society), basic freedom (sovereign within, but accepting the demands of an outside world and ’aligned with destiny’)” (Foucault, ”Revolutionary” 221). In other words, Enlightenment humanism claims to free individuals from all sorts of institutional oppressions while, at the same time, entailing an intensification of oppression over the self and denial of the power to resist this subjection. This subordination at the heart of freedom may be seen in the Kantian categorical imperative: while it is based on a freedom of consciousness, this freedom is nevertheless subject to absolute rational and moral categories. Classical freedom only liberates a certain form of subjectivity, while intensifying domination over the individual who is subordinated by these moral and rational criteria. That is to say that the discourse of freedom is based on a specific form of subjectivity–the autonomous, rational man of the Enlightenment and liberalism. As Foucault and Stirner show, this form of freedom is only made possible through the domination and exclusion of other modes of subjectivity that do not conform to this rational model. In other words, while morality does not deny or constrain freedom in an overt way–in Kant’s case moral maxims are based on the individual’s freedom of choice–this freedom is nevertheless restricted in a more subtle fashion because it is required to conform to moral and rational absolutes.

It is clear, then, that for both Stirner and Foucault, the classical Kantian idea of freedom is deeply problematic. It constructs the individual as ”rational” and ”free” while subjecting him to absolute moral and rational norms, and dividing him into rational and irrational, moral and immoral selves. The individual freely conforms to these rational norms, and in this way his subjectivity is constructed as a site of its own oppression. The silent tyranny of the self-imposed norm has become the prevailing mode of subjection. While for Kant, moral maxims and rational norms existed in a complementary relationship with freedom, for Stirner and Foucault the relationship is much more paradoxical and conflicting. It is not that transcendental moral and rational norms deny freedom per se–indeed in the Kantian paradigm they presuppose freedom.

It is rather that the form of freedom brought into being through these absolute categories implies other, more subtle forms of domination. This domination is made possible precisely because freedom's relationship with power is masked. For Kant, as we have seen, freedom is an absence from coercion. However, for Stirner and Foucault, freedom is always implicated in power relations–power relations that are creative as well as restrictive. To ignore this, moreover, to perpetuate the comforting illusion that freedom promises a universal liberation from power, is to play right into the hands of domination. It may be argued, then, that Foucault and Stirner uncover, in different ways, the authoritarian underside or the "other scene" of Kantian freedom.

Foucauldian Freedom: The Care of the Self

This does not mean, however, that Stirner and Foucault reject the idea of freedom. On the contrary, they interrogate the limits of the Enlightenment project of freedom in order to expand it–to invent new forms of freedom and autonomy that go beyond the restrictions of the categorical imperative. Indeed, as Olivia Custer shows, Foucault is as engaged as Kant in the problematic of freedom. However, as we shall see, he seeks to approach the question of freedom in a different way–through concrete ethical strategies and practices of the self.

For Foucault, the illusion of a state of freedom beyond the world of power must be dispelled. Moreover, freedom's attachment to essentialist categories and pre-ordained moral and rational coordinates must at least be questioned. However, the concept of freedom is very important for Foucault–he does not want to dispense with it, but rather to situate it in a realm of power relations that necessarily make it indeterminate. It is only through a rethinking of freedom in this way that it can be wrested from the metaphysical world and brought to the level of the individual. Rather than the abstract Kantian notion of freedom as a rational choice beyond constraints and limitations, freedom for Foucault exists in mutual and reciprocal relations with power. Moreover, rather than freedom being presupposed by absolute moral maxims, it is actually presupposed by power. According to Foucault, power may be understood as a series of "actions upon the action of others" in which multiple discourses, counterdiscourses, strategies, and technologies clash with one another–specific relations of power always provoking specific and localized relations of resistance. Resistance is something that exceeds power and is at the same time integral to its dynamic. Power is based on a certain freedom of action, a certain choice of possibilities. In this sense, "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault, "Subject" 208-26). Unlike classical schema in which power and freedom were diagrammatically opposed, Foucauldian thinking asserts the total dependency of the former on the latter. Where there is no freedom, where the field of action is absolutely restricted and determined, according to Foucault, there can be no power: slavery, for instance, is not a power relationship (Foucault, "Subject" 221).

Foucault's notion of freedom is a radical departure from Kant's. Whereas, for Kant, freedom is abstracted from the constraints and limitations of power, for Foucault, freedom is the very basis of these limits and constraints. Freedom is not a metaphysical and transcendental concept. Rather, it is entirely of this world and exists in a complicated and entangled relationship with power. Indeed, there can be no possibility of a world free from power relations, as power and freedom cannot exist without one another.

Moreover, Foucault is able to see freedom as being implicated in power relations because, for him, freedom is more than just the absence or negation of constraint. He rejects the "repressive" model of freedom which presupposes an essential self–a universal human nature–that is restricted and needs to be liberated. The liberation of an essential subjectivity is the basis of classical Enlightenment notions of freedom and is still central to our political imaginary. However, both Foucault and Stirner reject this idea of an essential self–this is merely an illusion created by power. As Foucault says, "The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself" (Discipline 30). While he does not discount acts of political liberation–for example when a people tries to liberate itself from colonial rule–this cannot operate as the basis for an ongoing mode of freedom. To suppose that freedom can be established eternally on the basis of this initial act of liberation is only to invite new forms of domination. If freedom is to be an enduring feature of any political society it must be seen as a practice–an ongoing strategy and mode of action that continuously challenges and questions relations of power.

This practice of freedom is also a creative practice–a continuous process of self-formation of the subject. It is in this sense that freedom may be seen as positive. One of the features that characterizes modernity, according to Foucault, is a Baudelairean "heroic" attitude toward the present. For Baudelaire, the contingent, fleeting nature of modernity is to be confronted with a certain "attitude" toward the present that is concomitant with a new mode of relationship that one has with oneself. This involves a reinvention of the self: "This modernity does not 'liberate man in his own being'; it compels him to face the task of producing himself" (Foucault, "What" 42). So, rather than freedom being a liberation of man's essential self from external constraints, it is an active and deliberate practice of inventing oneself. This practice of freedom may be found in the example of the dandy, or flâneur, "who makes of his body, his behavior, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art" (Foucault, "What" 41-2). It is this practice of self-aestheticization that allows us, according to Foucault, to reflect critically on the limits of our time. It does not seek a metaphysical place beyond all limits, but rather works within the limits and constraints of the present. More importantly, however, it is also a work conducted upon the limits of ourselves and our own identities. Because power operates through a process of subjectification–by tying the individual to an essential identity–the radical reconstitution of the self is a necessary act of resistance. This idea of freedom, then, defines a new form of politics more relevant to contemporary regimes of power: "The political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to liberate the individual from the State and its institutions, but to liberate ourselves from the State and the type of individualisation linked to it" (Foucault, "Subject" 216).

For Foucault, moreover, the liberation of the self is a distinctly ethical practice. It involves a notion of "care for the self" whereby one's desires and behavior are regulated by oneself so that freedom may be practiced ethically. This sensitivity to the care for oneself and the ethical practice of freedom could be found, Foucault suggests, among the Greeks and Romans of antiquity. For them the freedom of the individual was an ethical problem. Because the desire for power over others was also a threat to one's own freedom, the exercise of power was something that had to be regulated, monitored, and limited. To be a slave to one's own desires was as bad as being subject to another's desires. This regulation of one's desires and practices required an ethics of behavior that one constructed for oneself. In order to practice freedom ethically, in order to be truly free, one had to achieve power over oneself, over one's desires. As Foucault shows, in ancient Greek

and Roman thinking, ”the good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power correctly, i.e., by exercising at the same time his power on himself” (”Ethics” 288).

This ethical practice of freedom associated with the care for the self begins, however, at a certain point to sound somewhat Kantian. Indeed, as Foucault says, ”for what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom? […]. Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics” (”Ethics” 284). Does this not appear to re-invoke the categorical imperative where, for Kant, morality presupposes and is founded on freedom? Has Foucault, in his attempt to escape the absolutism of morality and rationality, reintroduced the categorical imperative in this careful regulation of behavior and desire? There can be no doubt about the stringency of this form of ethics. In The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, Foucault describes the Greeks' and Romans' prescriptions concerning everything from diet and exercise to sex. However, I would suggest that there is an important difference between the ethics of care and the universal moral maxims insisted on by Kant. The regulation of behavior and the problematization of freedom central to the ethic of care are things that one applies to oneself, rather than being imposed externally from a universal point beyond the individual. Foucault's practice of freedom is, in this sense, an ethics, rather than a morality. It is a certain consistency of modes and behaviors that has as its object the consideration and problematization of the self. In other words, it allows the self to be seen as an open project to be constituted through the ethical practices of the individual, rather than as something defined a priori by universal, transcendental laws. Moral laws do not apply here–there is no transcendental authority or universal imperative that sanctions these ethical practices and penalizes infractions. According to Foucault, morality is defined by the type of subjectification it entails. On the one hand, there is the morality that enforces the code, through injunctions, and which entails a form of subjectivity that refers the individual's conduct to these laws, submitting it to their universal authority. This, it could be argued, is the morality of Kant's categorical imperative. On the other hand, argues Foucault, there is the morality in which

> the accent was placed on the relationship of the self that enabled the person to keep from being carried away by the appetites and pleasures, to maintain a mastery and superiority over them, to keep his senses in a state of tranquility, to remain free from interior bondage to the passions, and to achieve a mode of being that could be defined by the full enjoyment of oneself, or the perfect supremacy of oneself over oneself. (Use 29-30)

We can see, then, that Foucault's notion of freedom as an ethical practice is radically different from Kant's idea of freedom as the basis of universal moral law. For Foucault, freedom is ethical because it implies an open-ended project that is conducted upon oneself, the aim of which is to increase the power that one exercises over oneself and to limit and regulate the power one exercises over others. In this way, one's personal freedom and autonomy are enhanced. For Kant, on the other hand, freedom is the basis of a metaphysical morality that must be universally obeyed. For Foucault, in other words, ethics intensifies freedom and autonomy, whereas for Kant, freedom and autonomy are ultimately circumscribed by the very morality they make possible.

So, there are two related aspects of Foucault's concept of freedom that must be emphasized here. Firstly, there is the practice of freedom that allows one to liberate oneself, not from external limits that repress one's essence, but rather from the limits imposed by this very essence. It involves, in a sense, the transgression of these limits through a transgression and reinvention of

oneself. It is a form of freedom which operates within the limits of power, enabling the individual to make use of the limits in inventing him/herself. Secondly, there is the aspect of freedom that is distinctly ethical–it is a practice of care for the self that has as its aim an increase of the power over oneself and one's desires, thus keeping in check one's exercise of power over others. In this way, the practice of care for the self allows the individual to navigate an ethical course of action amidst power relations, with the aim of intensifying freedom and personal autonomy. Therefore, freedom is conceived as an ongoing and contingent practice of the self that is not determined in advance by fixed moral and rational laws.

The Two Enlightenments

In his later essay "What Is Enlightenment?," Foucault considers Kant's insistence on the free and public use of autonomous reason as an escape, a "way out" for man from a state of immaturity and subordination. While Foucault believes that this autonomous reason is useful because it allows a critical ethos toward modernity, he refuses the "blackmail" of the Enlightenment–the insistence that this critical ethos at the heart of the Enlightenment be inscribed in a universal rationality and morality. The problem with Kant is that he opens up a space for individual autonomy and critical reflection on the limits of oneself, only to close this space down by re-inscribing it in transcendental notions of rationality and morality that require absolute obedience. For Foucault, the legacy of the Enlightenment is deeply ambiguous. As Colin Gordon shows, for Foucault there are two Enlightenments–the Enlightenment of rational certainty, absolute identity, and destiny, and the Enlightenment of continual questioning and uncertainty. According to Foucault, this ambiguity is reflected in Kant's own treatment of the Enlightenment.

There is perhaps a Kantian moment in Foucault (or could we say a Foucauldian moment in Kant?). Foucault shows how one might read Kant in a heterogeneous way, focusing on the more libratory aspect of his thinking–where we are encouraged to interrogate the limits of modernity, to reflect critically on the way we have been constituted as subjects. As Foucault shows, Kant sees the Enlightenment (Aufklärung) as a critical condition, characterized by an "audacity to know" and the free and autonomous public use of reason. This critical condition is concomitant with a "will to revolution"–with the attempt to understand revolution (in Kant's case the French Revolution) as an Event that allows an interrogation of the conditions of modernity–"an ontology of the present"–and the way we as subjects stand in relation to it (Foucault, "Kant" 88-96). Foucault suggests that we may adopt this critical strategy to reflect upon the limits of the discourse of the Enlightenment itself and its universal rational and moral injunctions. We may in this sense use the critical capacities of the Enlightenment against itself, thus opening up spaces for individual autonomy within its edifice, beyond the grasp of universal laws.

This critical stance toward the present, and the practice of the "care for the self" with which it is bound up, outline a genealogical strategy of freedom–a strategy that, as Foucault says "is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus [...] to the undefined work of freedom" ("What" 46).

Stirner's Theory of Ownness

As we shall see, it is precisely this desire to give new impetus to freedom, to take it out of the realm of empty dreams and promises, that is reflected in Stirner's theory of ownness. He adopts a "genealogical" approach similar to Foucault's in making the focus of freedom the self and situating freedom amidst relations of power.

The idea of transgressing and reinventing the self–of freeing the self from fixed and essential identities–is also a central theme in Stirner's thinking. As we have seen, Stirner shows that the notion of human essence is an oppressive fiction derived from an inverted Christian idealism that tyrannizes the individual and is linked with various forms of political domination. Stirner describes a process of subjectification which is very similar to Foucault's: rather than power operating as downward repression, it rules through the subjectification of the individual, by defining him according to an essential identity. As Stirner says: "the State betrays its enmity to me by demanding that I be a man . . . it imposes being a man upon me as a duty" (161). Human essence imposes a series of fixed moral and rational ideas on the individual, which are not of his creation and which curtail his autonomy. It is precisely this notion of duty, of moral obligation–the same sense of duty that is the basis of the categorical imperative–that Stirner finds oppressive.

For Stirner, then, the individual must free him- or herself from these oppressive ideas and obligations by first freeing himself from essence–from the essential identity that is imposed on him. Freedom involves, then, a transgression of essence, a transgression of the self. But what form should this transgression take? Like Foucault, Stirner is suspicious of the language of liberation and revolution–it is based on a notion of an essential self that supposedly throws off the chains of external repression. For Stirner, it is precisely this notion of human essence that is itself oppressive. Therefore, different strategies of freedom are called for–ones that abandon the humanist project of liberation and seek, rather, to reconfigure the subject in new and non-essentialist ways. To this end, Stirner calls for an insurrection:

> Revolution and insurrection must not be looked upon as synonymous. The former consists in an overturning of conditions, of the established condition or status, the state or society, and is accordingly a political or social act; the latter has indeed for its unavoidable consequence a transformation of circumstances, yet does not start from it but from men's discontent with themselves, is not an armed rising but a rising of individuals, a getting up without regard to the arrangements that spring from it. The revolution aimed at new arrangements; insurrection leads us no longer to let ourselves be arranged, but to arrange ourselves, and sets no glittering hopes on "institutions." It is not a fight against the established, since, if it prospers, the established collapses of itself; it is only a working forth of me out of the established. (279-80)

So while a revolution aims at transforming existing social and political conditions so that human essence may flourish, an insurrection aims at freeing the individual from this very essence. Like Foucault's practices of freedom, the insurrection aims at transforming the relationship that the individual has with himself. The insurrection starts, then, with the individual refusing his or her enforced essential identity: it starts, as Stirner says, from men's discontent with themselves. Insurrection does not aim at overthrowing political institutions. It is aimed at the individual, in

a sense transgressing his own identity–the outcome of which is, nevertheless, a change in political arrangements. Insurrection is therefore not about becoming what one is–becoming human, becoming man–but about becoming what one is not.

This ethos of escaping essential identities through a reinvention of oneself has many important parallels with the Baudelarian aestheticization of the self that interests Foucault. Like Baudelaire's assertion that the self must be treated as a work of art, Stirner sees the self–or the ego–as a "creative nothingness," a radical emptiness which is up to the individual to define: "I do not presuppose myself, because I am every moment just positing or creating myself" (135). The self, for Stirner, is a process, a continuous flow of self-creating flux–it is a process that eludes the imposition of fixed identities and essences: "no concept expresses me, nothing that is designated as my essence exhausts me" (324).

Therefore, Stirner's strategy of insurrection and Foucault's project of care for the self are both contingent practices of freedom that involve a reconfiguration of the subject and its relationship with the self. For Stirner, as with Foucault, freedom is an undefined and open-ended project in which the individual engages. The insurrection, as Stirner argues, does not rely on political institutions to grant freedom to the individual, but looks to the individual to invent his or her own forms of freedom. It is an attempt to construct spaces of autonomy within relations of power, by limiting the power that is exercised over the individual by others and increasing the power that the individual exercises over himself. The individual, moreover, is free to reinvent himself in new and unpredictable ways, escaping the limits imposed by human essence and universal notions of morality.

The notion of insurrection involves a reformulation of the concept of freedom in ways that are radically post-Kantian. Stirner suggests, for instance, that there can be no truly universal idea of freedom; freedom is always a particular freedom in the guise of the universal. The universal freedom that, for Kant, is the domain of all rational individuals, would only mask some hidden particular interest. Freedom, according to Stirner, is an ambiguous and problematic concept, an "enchantingly beautiful dream" that seduces the individual yet remains unattainable, and from which the individual must awaken.

Furthermore, freedom is a limited concept. It is only seen in its narrow negative sense. Stirner wants, rather, to extend the concept to a more positive freedom to. Freedom in the negative sense involves only self-abnegation–to be rid of something, to deny oneself. That is why, according to Stirner, the freer the individual ostensibly becomes, in accordance with the emancipative ideals of Enlightenment humanism, the more he loses the power he exercises over himself. On the other hand, positive freedom–or ownness–is a form of freedom that is invented by the individual for him or herself. Unlike Kantian freedom, ownness is not guaranteed by universal ideals or categorical imperatives. If it were, it could only lead to further domination: "The man who is set free is nothing but a freed man [...] he is an unfree man in the garment of freedom, like the ass in the lion's skin" (152).

Freedom must, rather, be seized by the individual. For freedom to have any value it must be based on the power of the individual to create it. "My freedom becomes complete only when it is my–might; but by this I cease to be a merely free man, and become and own man" (151). Stirner was one of the first to recognize that the true basis of freedom is power. To see freedom as a universal absence of power is to mask its very basis in power. The theory of ownness is a recognition, and indeed an affirmation, of the inevitable relation between freedom and power. Ownness is the realization of the individual's power over himself–the ability to create his or her

own forms of freedom, which are not circumscribed by metaphysical or essentialist categories. In this sense, ownness is a form of freedom that goes beyond the categorical imperative. It is based on a notion of the self as a contingent and open field of possibilities, rather than on an absolute and dutiful adherence to external moral maxims.

Conclusion

This idea of ownness is crucial in formulating a post-Kantian concept of freedom. Perhaps, in Stirner's words, "Ownness created a new freedom" (147). Firstly, ownness allows freedom to be considered beyond the limits of universal moral and rational categories. Ownness is the form of freedom that one invents for oneself, rather than one that is guaranteed by transcendental ideals. Foucault, too, sought to "free" freedom from these oppressive limits. Secondly, ownness converges closely with Foucault's own argument about freedom being situated in power relations. Like Foucault, Stirner shows that the idea of freedom as entailing a complete absence of power and constraint is illusory. The individual is always involved in a complex network of power relations, and freedom must be fought for, reinvented, and renegotiated within these limits. Ownness may be seen, then, as creating the possibilities of resistance to power. Similarly to Foucault, Stirner maintains that freedom and resistance can always exist, even in the most oppressive conditions. In this sense, ownness is a project of freedom and resistance within power's limits–it is the recognition of the fundamentally antagonistic and ambiguous nature of freedom. Thirdly, not only is ownness an attempt to limit the domination of the individual, but it is also a way of intensifying the power that one exercises over oneself. We have seen that for both Stirner and Foucault, Kant's universal freedom is based on absolute moral and rational norms that limit individual sovereignty. Foucault and Stirner are both interested, in different ways, in reformulating the concept of freedom: through the ethical practice of care of the self and through the strategy of ownness, both of which are aimed at increasing the power that the individual has over himself.

These two strategies allow us to conceptualize freedom in a more contemporary way. Freedom can no longer be seen as a universal emancipation, the eternal promise of a world beyond the limits of power. The freedom that forms the basis of the categorical imperative, the freedom exalted by Kant as the province of reason and morality, can no longer serve as the basis for contemporary ideas of freedom. It has been also shown by Stirner and Foucault to exclude and oppress where it includes, to enslave where it also liberates. Freedom must be seen as no longer being subservient to absolute maxims of morality and rationality, to imperatives that invoke the dull, cold inevitability of law and punishment. For Stirner and Foucault, freedom must be "freed" from these absolute notions. Rather than a privilege that is granted from a metaphysical point to the individual, freedom must be seen as a practice, a critical ethos of the self, and as a struggle that is engaged in by the individual within the problematic of power. It necessarily involves a reflection on the limits of the self and the ontological conditions of the present–a constant reinvention and problematization of subjectivity. A post-Kantian freedom, in this way, is not only a recognition of power, but also a reflection upon power's limits–an affirmation of the possibilities of individual autonomy within power and of the critical capacities of modern subjectivity.

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