FREEDOM AND FINITUDE:
A STUDY OF HEIDEGGER AND FOUCALUT

By

Robert Lee Nichols

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Robert Lee Nichols, 2009
The primary task of this work is a comparative analysis of the understanding of ‘freedom’ as presented in the works of Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault. I argue that, taken together, Heidegger and Foucault represent the most systematic and coherent articulation since Marx of the notion that our primary experience of the world is not mediated by consciousness but is, instead, a practical relation. This position permits Heidegger and Foucault to cast freedom not as a property, status or standing to be achieved by the subject, nor as an end-state to be achieved through a developmental anthropology, but rather as an ethical relationship to a field of possibilities—an ethos—and the practices that sustain this relationship. I use this discussion on freedom as a means of also contributing to two other debates, one regarding the general possibility of combining ontological and historical forms of critical analysis and the second, more specific question of Foucault’s relationship to Heidegger.
Acknowledgements

My greatest intellectual debt is owed to my supervisor, James Tully, who not only taught me a great deal about the thinkers and themes that comprise this work but, perhaps more importantly, was a model of the kind of ethical attentiveness I seek to understand and embody.

The other members of my committee were also quite helpful, providing interesting and important questions and comments along the way. Thanks to Ronnie Beiner, Peggy Kohn and David Cook at the University of Toronto and to Leslie Paul Thiele at the University of Florida.

Thanks are due to all the great people I met during my stay at the University of Victoria, especially Brad Bryan, Johnny Mack and all those in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject* seminar group.

Financial support for my doctoral studies was provided by the Trudeau Foundation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

On a more personal note, there is an irony in the fact that the greater my indebtedness to someone, the more difficult it is for me to express appreciation. In relation to some people, anything I write here would seem inadequate. I will be quite brief then, trusting that my gratitude to each is expressed in a living relationship more than what I can say on this one page. A few people stand out in this regard: my family, Glen Coulthard, Amanda Dowling, Hadyen and Tulita, Jakeet Singh and Erin Robinsong. Thank you all.

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Bruce Nichols (1949-2005).
Abbreviations

Heidegger—Original Texts

SZ  
Sein und Zeit (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967)

GA 1-77  
Gesamtausgabe (Frankfurt Am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975-2000)

Heidegger—Translations

BTa  

BTb  

BW  
Basic Writings (NY: Harper & Row, 1977)

EHF  

FCM  

IM  
An Introduction to Metaphysics, James Manheim (trans.) (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1984)

KPM  

MFL  
The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic, Michael Heim (trans.) (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984)

N1-4  

OBT  
Off the Beaten Track (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002)

OHF  
Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity, John van Buren (trans.), (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999)

P  

TB  

Foucault—Original Texts

A  
Les anormaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1999)

AS  
L’archéologie du savoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1969)

DE1-2  

FDS  
Il faut défendre la société (Paris: Gallimard, 1997)

HF  
Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique (Paris: Gallimard, 1972)

HS  
L’herméneutique du sujet (Paris: Gallimard, 2001)

MC  
Les mots et les choses (Paris: Gallimard, 1966)

MMP  
Maladie mentale et psychologie, 4e édition (Paris: Quadridge/Puf, 2005)

NC  
| OD       | L’ordre du discours (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) |
| SP       | Surveiller et punir (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) |
| STP      | Sécurité, territoire, population (Paris: Gallimard, 2004) |

**Foucault—Translations**

| 2       | Abnormal (NY: Picador, 2003) |
| AK      | The Archaeology of Knowledge (London & NY: Routledge, 2002) |
| Herm.   | The Hermeneutics of the Subject (NY: Picador, 2006) |
| HP      | ‘Interview with Michael Bess,’ The History of the Present, No.4 (Spring 1988) |
| MIP     | Mental Illness and Psychology (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) |
| OT      | The Order of Things (London & NY: Routledge, 1989) |
| PT      | The Politics of Truth, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (NY: Semiotext(e), 1997) |
| RC      | Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault, Jeremy R.Carrette (ed.) (NY: Routledge, 1999) |
| RM      | Foucault: Remarks on Marx, Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, trans. R.James Goldstein and James Cascaito (NY: Semiotext(e), 1991) |
| SMD     | ‘Society must be defended’ (NY: Picador, 2003) |
| TS      | Technologies of the Self (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988) |
Note Regarding Citation:

- Emphasis is in the original unless otherwise indicated.
- Additional works cited appended.
Table of Contents

Title .................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................ ii
Abstract .............................................................................................................. iii
Abbreviations ...................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents ............................................................................................... vii

Chapter 1:
Introduction: Overview of the Problematic and Interpretive Questions ........... 1
  I: Ontologies of Freedom ................................................................................... 5
  II: Questions of Interpretation and Influence .................................................... 21
    II.A. Marcuse’s Gambit Reconsidered ............................................................. 22
    II.B. Interpreting Foucault’s Heideggerianism .............................................. 25
      II.B.2 Strong Influence ............................................................................. 31
      II.B.3. Weak Influence ............................................................................ 34
      II.B.4. Sources of Influence: Klossowski and Althusser ......................... 37

Chapter 2:
Potentiality and Authenticity: Heidegger’s preparatory existential analytic in Being and Time ........................................................... 41
  I. Freedom between Actuality and Potentiality ............................................... 46
  II. Existential Analytic I: ‘Worldhood’ (§9-25) .............................................. 47
  III. Existential Analytic II: Selfhood (§25-27) & Understanding (§25-38) ...... 52
  IV. Mode of the Possible ............................................................................... 56
  V. Understanding and Projection ................................................................... 59
  VI. Freedom and the Authentic / Inauthentic Distinction .............................. 69
  VII. Critique of Authenticity ......................................................................... 77

Chapter 3:
The Field of Freedom: Heidegger from Fundamental to Historical Ontology .... 80
  I. The Field of Freedom .................................................................................... 83
    I.A. Background Understanding ................................................................ 85
    I.B. Spielraum .............................................................................................. 88
  II. Openness .................................................................................................. 93
  III. Metaphysics and (Self)Concealment ....................................................... 101
  IV. From ‘Fundamental’ to ‘Historical’ Ontology ......................................... 110

Chapter 4:
Foucault’s Critique of Heidegger .................................................................... 115
  I. Historicizing the Phenomenology of ‘Experience’ ..................................... 116
  II. Critique of Hermeneutics .......................................................................... 127
    II.A. ‘Deep’ Interpretation ......................................................................... 128
    II.B. Excess of the Signified ...................................................................... 131
    II.C. Pastoral Power ................................................................................... 134
  III. Analytics of Finitude: The Unthought & ‘Original Man’ ....................... 143
### Chapter 5:
**Foucault’s ‘Auto-Critique’: Three Equivocations of Conduct, Experience and Thought**

- **I: Three Equivocations**
  - I.A. The Model of War ................................................................. 160
  - I.B. The Arts of Government, Governmentality and Conduct ........ 164
  - I.C. Experience and Thought ....................................................... 174
- **II: Freedom in three stages: contingent event, thought, spiritual exercise** .................................................. 187

### Chapter 6:
**The Subject of Spirituality** .............................................................. 205

- **I: Spirituality and Care** ............................................................... 207
  - I.A. Spirituality ................................................................. 209
  - I.B. Care .................................................................................. 217
- **II: Of Selves and Subjects** ........................................................... 220
- **III: The History of Subjectivity** .................................................. 231
  - III.A. ‘Le moment cartésian’ ..................................................... 236
  - III.B. Kant, humanism and teleological anthropology ............... 239

### Chapter 7:
**Conclusion: Against Liberation Machines** ........................................ 256

- **I. Overview** ............................................................................... 256
- **II. Historical Ontology** ............................................................... 261
- **III. Remainders** ........................................................................ 264

### Works Cited** ................................................................................. 272
This project takes as its point of departure two generalizable movements within modern (post-Kantian) practical philosophy. First is the observation that modern European thought has become less preoccupied with questions of foundational first premises—with the search for the final arbiter of questions of truth—and more centrally oriented around critical practices of liberation. Philosophy has come to serve less as a term of reference for a specific model or method of inquiry into truth (as it was, say, with Descartes) and more as a lived project which purports not merely to be true but also liberating. Of course, what we are to be emancipated from, and the methods of this emancipation differ greatly whether we are speaking of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche or the host of contributors to this dialogue throughout the 20th and now 21st centuries.

The second generalization is that this increased preoccupation with freedom has largely been taken up against the backdrop of what might be called the philosophy of the constituting subject. A movement is observable in 19th and 20th century thought not only away from questions of truth towards questions of freedom, but also away from an understanding of freedom less as a property of the subject and more as a practice (something one does rather than has) and/or the resulting relationship to the world. Increasingly, the freedom we are talking about is a situation brought about through an ongoing practical relationship with the world and others. It is not something to be found, but rather something to be made and maintained.  

---

1 John McCumber refers to this movement as the increased tendency “to construe freedom in terms of situations, not of subjects.” Philosophy and Freedom (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000), p.3.
One of the main ways in which these two movement have developed in the twentieth century is through the turn to intersubjectivity. Instead of locating questions of freedom in the search for transcendental properties of the subject (i.e., consciousness, the categories of intuition and the like), philosophers of intersubjectivity have sought to ground emancipatory praxis in the discursively mediated interaction between subjects. Such theories offer the insight that the identity and constitution of the subject is not determined \textit{a priori} but rather formed through intersubjective reciprocity between agents, an insight often traced back to Hegel. As such, the move to intersubjectivity can be read as a contribution to both of the two general trajectories set out: it ties the question of truth to the question of freedom, and does so in a manner that attempts to avoid the problems associated with a philosophy of consciousness. The most recent contribution to this line of inquiry is the discourse ethics of Jürgen Habermas. Undoubtedly, Habermas’ \textit{oeuvre} represents the single most ambitious and systematic attempt to overcome the philosophy of the constituting subject through recourse to a theory of communicative rationality that understands the transcendental condition for critique not in consciousness, but in intersubjective discursive activity.\footnote{An alternative theory of intersubjectivity that draws more from Hegel and hermeneutic philosophy is Charles Taylor’s ‘recognition thesis’ in which ‘freedom’ is a function not of transcendental will, but rather is discursively created and maintained through dialogical relations of mutual respect and reciprocity.} Underlying much of my discussion to follow is the conviction that, despite Habermas’ important insights, no theory of intersubjective communicative rationality can bypass the disclosing function of the pre-reflective activities by which a ‘world’ of intelligible entities (including the very ‘subjects’ who may engage in a discourse ethics) come into view in the first place. In other words, the
field of possible subjects with which one may engage is not, in the first instance, discovered discursively-intersubjectively but rather practically-holistically.³

While theories of intersubjectivity have garnered a great deal of attention with respect to their considerable contributions to post-Kantian practical philosophy, there is another alternative. The possibility that an ontological inquiry might provide another route beyond the philosophy of the constituting subject (and even an alternative to the philosophy of intersubjectivity) has been widely noted. Even as trenchant a critic of Heidegger as Habermas has praised the way in which Heidegger’s “postmetaphysical historicizing” advances the

overcoming of the philosophy of subjectivity... From today’s standpoint, Heidegger’s new beginning still presents probably the most profound turning point in German philosophy since Hegel.⁴

However, despite the wide recognition that Heidegger’s work has gained in terms of challenging the philosophy of subjectivity, the implications of this remain underdeveloped for practical philosophy. Hence, the questions posed here: To what extent might the movement of freedom in post-Kantian political philosophy be recast in ontological terms? What difference might this make to the range of practical vocabularies available to us, currently preoccupied as they are with issues of intersubjectivity? The two thinkers I find indispensable for such an inquiry are Martin Heidegger and Michel Foucault.

The choice to draw upon Heidegger in an attempt to recast a discussion of freedom in ontological terms is rather straightforward. Heidegger is known not only for

---

³ For a critique of Habermas along these lines, see Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

his insistence on ontology as the central preoccupation of philosophy, but also on the centrality of freedom to this form of analysis. Despite this insistence, and in contradistinction to the wealth of literature on freedom and transcendental subjectivity, or freedom and intersubjectivity, Heidegger’s ontological thesis has not been fully explored in relation to the question of freedom. To date, no monograph devotes itself singularly to addressing the question: What did Heidegger understand by the term ‘freedom’? Or, more generally: What implications are there for thinking about questions of freedom after Heidegger’s formulation of ontology? In fact, secondary literature on Heidegger and freedom is relatively hard to come by in either philosophy generally or political theory more specifically. This lack of sustained reflection is surprising and requires rectification.

Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault to investigate this topic is a considerably less obvious move. Although Foucault did speak of his work as a ‘historical ontology’ and of freedom as a kind of ‘ontological ground’, nowhere in his writings does he devote himself to a sustained, straightforward discussion of what ‘ontology’ means to him. Since virtually the entire second half of the dissertation is devoted to demonstrating the centrality of ontological considerations to Foucault’s analysis of freedom, I will not rehearse them here. Instead, I will merely direct readers to the bulk of the text as a

---

defense of the importance of putting these two into direct conversation with each other concerning this topic.

There is, of course, another tack one might take in explicating and defending a study of Heidegger and Foucault, one that focuses on textual traces and personal connections. This kind of inquiry would no doubt place emphasis on Foucault’s declaration at the end of his life that Heidegger was, for him, “the essential philosopher”, one who determined his “entire philosophical development.” (FL, 470; DE2, 1521-22) Taking up this (by no means self-evident) declaration as a textual and biographical problem is a legitimate and worthwhile project no doubt. However, this is not my original interest or concern. Of course, in the course of pursuing theoretical questions one cannot help but comment along the way on how Foucault engaged with Heidegger. To situate the discussion that follows within the context of this secondary, exegetical problem, I have provided a brief overview and discussion of the literature in Part II of this chapter below (Questions of Interpretation and Influence). Before proceeding to this, however, a more detailed sketch of the theoretical problematic is required.

I: Ontologies of Freedom

In the study that follows I attempt to track how Heidegger and Foucault develop their respective analyses of freedom in relation to questions of ontology. Engaging with these two thinkers, I argue, allows us to develop an analysis of freedom understood not in terms of a property of the subject, nor as an intersubjective activity, but as a mode of being in the world. More specifically, I argue that this kind of relationship and stylized mode of being seeks to disclose the mutual interrelatedness of (1) the acquisition of
knowledge, (2) the appearance of a domain of entities about which knowledge claims can be made, and (3) the ethical transformation of the subject of knowledge. One discloses this interrelatedness through a working out of the possibilities projected within the worldly activities of disclosure that make a horizon of intelligibility possible and thus are the field on which self-recognition and subject-formation takes place. To be in a ‘free’ relationship to this field or clearing is not, for Heidegger and Foucault, to detach oneself from it through an act of cognitive reflection. Rather, it is to cultivate a certain ethical attitude of awareness within the activities of disclosure which constitute the ontological ground of the field itself. It is, in a word, to take care of the field and, through this, of oneself.

The notion that the ethical transformation of the self in and through its worldly activities is linked to the acquisition of knowledge about the world of course did not begin with Heidegger and Foucault, nor is it unique to them. In fact, as both authors suggest, their formulation of the question in this manner has antecedents in the 19th century. Hegel, Stirner, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in particular might all be read with an eye to elucidating these connections. Given this longer heritage I have, at times, employed Charles Taylor’s terminology of “situated freedom”⁶ to describe the formation developed here. I borrow the term from Taylor not only because it evokes a historical link back to Hegel (through Nietzsche and Schopenhauer in particular), but also because for Taylor, situated freedom denoted a position between the largely negative notion of freedom as self-dependence and the positive notions of freedom centred around the expression of one’s ‘true’ self. As elaborated upon later in this work, the move to an ontological analysis of selfhood-in-action is an attempt to displace both the aspiration to

---

autonomy and to expressivism evoked by the prevailing language of positive vs. negative liberty. Instead, in Taylor’s words,

> What is common to all the varied notions of situated freedom is that they see free activity as grounded in the acceptance of our defining situation. The struggle to be free… is powered by an affirmation of this defining situation as ours.\(^7\)

The notion of acceptance points to a second theme: finitude. For Heidegger and Foucault, the acceptance of finitude—in the sense of acknowledging one’s factual limitations in a particular worldly condition and the fact that absolute knowledge of self and world is not, even in principle, possible—does not entail the end of freedom, but rather its beginning insofar as this acknowledgement provides the starting point for an ethical transformation of one’s mode or style of being within these conditions. In the last chapter, I will describe and defend this transformation as a spiritual one.

The reference above to autonomy and expressivism speaks to the need to articulate what we mean by situated freedom in relation to its historical alternatives. To situate a little better the field on which this discussion takes place, it is therefore helpful to sketch out some alternative discourses of freedom against which Heidegger and Foucault are working.

At the outset of this chapter, I mentioned the discussion of freedom in Heidegger and Foucault is very much set against a larger backdrop of the philosophy of the constituting subject. This philosophical backdrop owes much to Descartes and Kant in particular, about whose relationship to Heidegger and Foucault I will have more to say in the last chapter. For now, however, it is important to note the interrelationship between a certain conception of transcendental subjectivity and a corresponding understanding of freedom as autonomy, developed most fully and most influentially by Kant. In the brief

---

\(^7\) Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, p.160.
outline that follows, I draw most extensively upon Kant not because he is the exclusive or
even definitive contributor to the philosophical traditions I am attempting to sketch out.
Rather, it is because Kant remains the single most important figure in relation to which
Heidegger and Foucault position their respective work on freedom.

The formulation of freedom as ‘autonomy’ of the subject, against which a theory
of situated freedom is developed, owes most to Kant. Kant’s problematic of freedom
might be outlined through a two stage set of questions. The first question is the
following: (1) How can a creature which is subject to finite conditions (i.e., of space and
time) guarantee the universality of its claims to knowledge? Does not our finitude—
being subject to empirical laws of physics, causality, time, etc.—serve to limit our
capacity to generate truly universal claims such that knowledge itself is threatened? The
second question might be stated: (2) Does not this undermining of our reason in its
knowing capacity further undermine the possibility of free agency, given that such
agency rests on the possibility of rational determination? If the rational determination of
our will cannot be demonstrated to be generated by a knowable set of universal
conditions, then our agency is reduced to mere responsiveness to instinct or sensuous
inclinations (i.e., to finite conditions).

Kant’s unique and ingenious response to this problematic—the ‘Copernican
turn’— is to transcendentalize finitude. To ‘transcendentalize finitude’ is to redefine the
(empirical) limits of human understanding (the ‘limits of representation’) as
transcendental conditions, knowable by the subject. If our limitations of knowing can
themselves not only be known, but be shown to be transcendental conditions for
knowledge (as universal and necessary organizing categories for our faculties, i.e., time
and space), then, as Béatrice Han reminds us, the “move by which the a priori study of
our (limited) faculties becomes the starting point for construing the necessary form of our
knowledge, thus outlining the conditions of possibility of truth itself.”\(^8\) The famed
‘Copernican turn’ consisted then in overcoming human finitude by making it the
necessary, transcendental condition for knowledge as such. Han writes,

The empirical forms of our finitude (such as the passivity of our sensibility, the
partiality of our will to sensible inclinations, and so forth) are not overcome in the
obvious sense that they would be denied, or miraculously bypassed by the shift to
a more advanced state of the human race. Kant’s more subtle argument is that
although it has to be acknowledged as empirically unsurpassable, human finitude
should be redefined a priori and therefore understood positively, i.e., as what
generates the scope of our possible knowledge and ultimately (because it outlines
the possibility of rational determination itself) as the cornerstone of our freedom.\(^9\)

It is this mention of ‘the cornerstone of our freedom’ that draws the link to the discussion
at hand so vividly. The philosophy of the transcendental and constituting subject, in this
case finding its expression in Kant’s analytic of finitude, gives the philosophical backing
for an understanding of freedom centered around autonomy. Since it is the necessary
form of our knowledge, generated by the mind, that creates the possibility of rational
determination, this form of knowledge (this mind) stands in a transcendental relation to
the field of action. The subject does not merely reflect reality in the mind passively (as
with Locke’s tabula rasa) but rather actively organizes and orders reality in such a way
as to make rational determination possible. The second stage in this analysis is to
connect this transcendental function of the mind to positive freedom. Thus, in this model
freedom is equated not only with the transcendental subject (the free will which chooses)
but also with the active removal of those external impediments to full self-determination.

---

\(^8\) Béatrice Han, ‘Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg
(eds.), *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003),
p.128-129.

\(^9\) Han, ‘Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude,’ p.128.
Whether these be societal obstacles ‘outside’ the empirical subject, or non-rational features of the self (i.e., the passions), external determination of the will can represent only an impediment to the self-constituting and self-legislating subject. The idea of removing obstacles to self-determination is Kant’s way of linking what are referred to now as ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ liberty. *Transcendental* freedom for Kant refers to the absolute spontaneity of the will and derives from the capacity for rational determination. This transcendental freedom is defined negatively, but it is the basis on which he can further advocate autonomy as a form of positive freedom that seeks the *conditions* in which the appropriate moral motivation can be created so as to guide rational determination of the will (acting from duty alone). In between these two notions of freedom, Kant posits the purposiveness of nature as a means of reconciling the two.\(^{10}\)

Now, it is clear that both Heidegger and Foucault at least *claim* to be working against such a model of freedom as autonomous rational willing. What remains to be seen is whether, despite their protestations, they merely commit themselves to a slightly amended version of the philosophy of the constituting subject, perhaps not in the name of autonomous rational will but, instead, self-determination through self-creation. My reading of the two will attempt to demonstrate their critical potential as *alternatives* to the prevailing (Kantian) tradition by demonstrating that the work of both is animated by an understanding of selfhood as ontologically grounded in pre-reflective practices with independent (i.e., non-assigned) ethical import (relations of ‘care’). To commit oneself to an understanding of freedom as autonomy *from* such embodied relations would be nonsensical under this reading as it is the relations and practices themselves which provide the historical conditions of possibility for the exercise of agency.

\(^{10}\) Discussed in more detail below under the heading of ‘teleological freedom’.
Another important theoretical language against which this ontology of finitude and freedom is situated is what I will refer to here as teleological freedom. Again I will rely upon the formulation put forward by Kant, not because his is the exclusive or definitive formulation of the language of purposiveness, but because his particular formulation was so influential on others to come after (Hegel and Marx in particular), and because both Heidegger and Foucault make specific reference to it.

By ‘teleological freedom’, I am referring to the recourse to a purposiveness in history as a means of reconciling the transcendental freedom of pure spontaneity with the positive freedom of a social condition in which self-determination can be realized. A teleological or developmental model in this sense often begins from three basic premises; (1) a claim regarding the fundamental structures of consciousness (or, in the post-linguistic turn era, of the structure of communication) that determine the horizon possible content of knowledge, (2) that these deep structures are a universal property of the human species, and (3) that these structures of consciousness have an internal developmental logic. This model of freedom finds its expression in the developmental anthropologies throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, including most robustly in Hegel and Marx, but it also has retained credence in the 20th century, particularly through Habermas’ theory of societal evolution.\textsuperscript{11}

In the Kantian picture, it is an \textit{a priori} possibility that the division between the noumenal and phenomenal accounts of causality and freedom be resolved through the unilinear progress of history in which humanity can come to reshape the empirical world, through moral action, to better correspond with the demands of \textit{abstract freedom}

\textsuperscript{11} For a defense and elaboration of Habermas’ work in this regard, see David S. Owen, \textit{Between Reason and History: Habermas and the Idea of Progress} (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).
exercised in the noumenal realm (i.e., with reason). Thus, a **natural teleology of freedom** is required to fully realize the **abstract freedom** of the noumenal self.

It is important to note that the attribution of teleological ends to nature and human activities is not an empirically verifiable truth. Teleology is a form of ‘reflective judgment’ in which particular objects are judged without subsuming them under a determinate concept of the understanding. Reflective judgments don’t, for Kant, generate explanations which could be proved (or disproved), only maxims for reflection. This does not mean, however, that the positing of a natural teleology is unjustified since it is precisely when we are faced with radically contingent, unexpected objects of observation that we are authorized to consider that the “very contingency of the thing’s form is a basis for regarding the product as if it had come about through a causality that only reason can have.”

Such contingent objects are the effects of an unknown causality, which Kant calls ‘purposiveness’. Free will’s efficacy in the empirical world is precisely such a contingent ‘eruption’ that justifies recourse to ‘purposiveness’. Thus, as *The Critique of Judgment* is at pains to demonstrate, even if it is impossible to general empirically verifiable knowledge claims about purposiveness, this does not signify a failure of judgment, but rather demonstrates its central role.

Thus, Kant posits a reflective judgment about a third kind of causality which can bridge the mechanical causality of the empirical world with the ‘special causality’ of abstract freedom as experienced in the moral, noumenal realm. Only if mankind is itself the *telos* of nature—i.e., that it is nature’s design to produce self-legislating beings—can empirical, linear time be reconciled with abstract freedom. This *telos* then is world-

---

13 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §64, p. 298.
historical progress guided by Providence. If it weren’t for a natural teleology that
confirms humanity’s ability to force the empirical world to conform to its moral
commands, we would be at the mercy of “aimless random process, and the dismal reign
of chance.” In such circumstances, the duty to obey self-legislated moral commands
would lose its compulsory force and we would be doomed to the repetition of Sisyphean
deeds. Thus, for freedom to exist at all, we must posit—as a reflective judgment—a
divine “moral author” who has set into motion a natural teleology of progress in which
humans are working towards a kingdom of ends: “a happiness of rational beings that
harmoniously accompanies their compliance with moral laws.” The kingdom of ends
holds out the eternal possibility that the abstract freedom of the noumenal realm may be
realized even in the flow of mechanical, linear time.

Once we have posited the principle of natural teleology, we have an interpretive
key to understanding the contingencies of history. Specifically, natural teleology
becomes a regulative ideal that organizes and structures our experience of human history.
This means, therefore, we can interpret world events such as revolutions, wars, and acts
of seemingly purposeless violence as unintentional contributions to global progress
toward universal enlightenment. This does not mean that such acts are morally right—far
from it. But it does mean that they are in accordance with nature’s purpose. Without a
teleological interpretive framework for world history, Kant argued, these events would

---

14 Immanuel Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,’ in Political Writings
15 I take this reference to Sisyphean deeds from Yirmiahu Yovel, Kant and the Philosophy of History
16 See Kant, Critique of Judgment, “Comment” to §86 for a clear articulation of moral authorship.
17 Kant, Critique of Judgment, §87, p. 340.
appear as a meaningless collection of contingent facts—a pile of empirical data with no significant relation between them.

For Heidegger and Foucault the teleological anthropology of man, particularly when wedded to a theory of transcendental subjectivity, is precisely the frame against which their own work is situated. This critical relationship holds as true for the modified Kantianism of, say, Habermas. In this reformulation it is not the underlying structures of consciousness that serve as a regulative ideal for a model of corrective societal evolution, but rather the transcendental conditions of communication rationality which provide the basis of intersubjective discourse. Nevertheless, a corrective model of teleological development towards a more and more rational society (with its corresponding understanding of freedom as an end-state to be achieved, rather than an activity to be practiced) is the animating impulse behind such work, something both Heidegger and Foucault would reject.

Against these first two models then—the transcendental and the teleological—we have a third: situated freedom. The remainder of this thesis is an attempt to illustrate and defend the notion of situated freedom by drawing on Heidegger and Foucault. Even at this early junction, it is important to note that I do not understand this understanding of freedom to be an exclusively nineteenth or twentieth century phenomenon nor as a final stage in some grand linear narrative from transcendental to teleological and, finally, to situated freedom. The languages of transcendental and teleological freedom are still very important and influential languages for interpreting freedom today. Likewise, the language of situated freedom can be seen in the works of other thinkers in other times. What brings together these various thinkers and modes of interpretation in a ‘family
resemblance’ is their understanding of freedom as a practical relationship to one’s situation such that latent possibilities within one’s worldly activities are not foreclosed. To stand in a ‘free’ relation to the world, to oneself and one’s ethical commitments, is to know that one’s standpoint does not exhaust the total range of meaningful, viable and worthwhile possibilities. This grasping of the finitude of one’s own position and perspective is further complicated when we unpack what it would mean to ‘know’ such a thing as finitude. Internal to the story told by both Heidegger and Foucault is that to know something is not merely to grasp it conceptually or give a theoretical articulation of it. Rather, it is more fundamentally to be in this way, to weave this truth into one’s comportment. The test of our comprehension of this claim is not our ability to rephrase it back in the form of theoretical claims. Rather, it is the extent to which we actually embody the truth of this receptivity, fragility, indeterminacy and interconnectivity.18 As Thomas Dumm phrases it, freedom is not “a category or zone”. Rather, it is “a style of being in the world that depends on an awareness of how one cares for the world, or, to use George Kateb’s phrase, how one has ‘an attachment to existence’.19

Central to my thesis here is that this ‘attachment’ relationship implies a bringing together of ethical commitment, knowledge acquisition and the disclosure of a domain of

---

18 In this way at least, the Heideggerian and Foucaultian formulation of freedom through care-full engagement actually resonates more with certain pre-modern formulations of freedom in terms of right relation, than the near exclusive emphasis on self-dependence in post-Kantian practical philosophy. In this way, a dialogue is set up with, for instance, Aristotle. Freedom understood as a right relation with the world, either in terms of harmony, equilibrium or non-extremism, can only be understood in relative terms (that is, in relation to the particular factual conditions of the present) and cannot be merely grasped conceptually, but must become a part of oneself—a hexis—through the actual engagement with activities in this particular manner.

entities. As such, it can properly be referred to as an ‘ontological’ understanding of freedom. In using the predicate ‘ontological’, I am referring to a form of analysis that attempts to grasp the basic background conditions for the horizon of intelligibility that governs our engagement with the world. In distinction to an investigation of ‘epistemology’, ontology sees our basic understanding of the world (our Weltanschauung, or ‘world-view’) as an outgrowth of more basic prereflective practical involvement, the sets of activities in which we are always already engaged. An ontological analysis attempts to demonstrate that a claim to know something (an epistemological claim) already contains a backgrounded understanding about what kinds of entities there are to know, and an ethical stance—an existential commitment—towards these entities. When we engage in an ‘ontological form of critical analysis’, we are attempting either: (A) to be reminded of this mutual interrelatedness and the fundamental conditions that make it possible (this would be a fundamental ontology), or (B) to foreground the work being done by specific pre-reflective activities to animate and legitimate a particular horizon of intelligibility (this would be a historical ontology). Central to my argument here is that there is a necessary interconnection between these two types of analyses, one that links the kind of work represented by, for instance, Being and Time on the one hand and The History of Sexuality on the other. A basic claim animating the whole of this dissertation is that while Heidegger engages primarily with the first kind of analysis (fundamental ontology), this leads to his claim that historicity is one of the fundamental features of world-disclosure. This means that, rather than subordinate the historical contingency of particular activities of disclosure to some general ontological necessity which can be grasped philosophically through deduction of its transcendental necessity, this historical
contingency is *itself* taken to be fundamental. The conclusion of this line of reasoning is that no particular historical formation can be read as the necessary or universal condition for the possibility of social life *per se*. In this case, it is the notion that a certain ethics can be derived from necessary and universal epistemological claims (more specifically, arguments regarding the structure of truth claims) which ontology seeks to displace.

Taken up from the other side, however, a *historical* ontology cannot proceed without a commitment at least minimally to *historicity* as a fundamental feature of world-disclosure. I will attempt to demonstrate this in Chapter Six at least with respect to Foucault by rendering more explicit what I take to be some of his ‘ontological commitments’. Investigating such commitments, I argue, does not consist in constructing a transcendental ‘theory’ of historicity, but rather merely referencing the very *immanence* of our understandings of the world to our practical activities. What I suggest throughout this work, therefore, is that a particular mode of social or political organization that purports to be more (or less) ‘free’ cannot be derived from the theoretical elaboration of the transcendental conditions for social and political life. If not, then this commits one to a view of ‘freedom’ as *situated* in the specific sense I am using of the term. Namely, that ‘freedom’ is a relationship to the immanence of oneself and one’s understanding of the world. It simultaneously\(^{20}\) refers to practices which attempt to disclose the ossifying and totalizing effects of those features of our present ontology that conceal its historical finitude. This antonym of freedom (understood ontologically), I refer to throughout the work in terms of entrapment and closure. In suggesting that this concealing produces effects on the level of ethical, social and political life, I am attempting to demonstrate the

---

\(^{20}\) I say simultaneously because the relationship is sustained only in and through the practices. This folds into the general theme of a free relationship only being immanent within practices of freedom.
critical import of this form of analysis without committing to the claim that such effects can be understood or explained through reference to a single, invariable and necessary condition of ontological involvement (i.e., the ‘fallenness’ of Dasein historically). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

My attempt to think freedom and finitude in relation to historical ontology moves through several phases, each constituting a chapter in this dissertation. In the next chapter, I attempt to interrogate Heidegger’s move to fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* as arising within the horizon of a set of problems deriving from (what I will call here) the ‘philosophy of the constituting subject’, with particular reference to Descartes, Kant and Husserl. The move to fundamental ontology is read therefore as an attempt to dissolve the problems arising from traditional epistemology and metaphysics. I describe this as a ‘move’ to fundamental ontology because it supports my reading of *Being and Time* not merely as a text with an argument, but also as an action of the self in relation to the historical tradition that forms the field of possible thought, against and with which it is working. Fundamental ontology is offered as a ‘resolution’ to problems of epistemology. However, read this way we can also see how it immediately implicates itself since fundamental ontology’s claim to reveal the mutual implication of subject and object within an already existing ‘world’ folds back upon the claimant—in this case Heidegger—as a ‘subject’ of knowledge. Thus, fundamental ontology demands not only an explication of the transformation of the subject in relation to this new knowledge, but must *itself* be seen as an attempt at self-transformation. Hence the linking of knowledge acquisition to the ethical-spiritual transformation of the subject in *Being and Time*. 
Chapter Three investigates fundamental ontology’s self-implication further by investigating the provisional theses posed in *Being and Time* that (a) an epistemological domain is disclosed only through a specific ethical positioning of the subject of knowledge and (b) that this positioning is disclosed to *Dasein* within the horizon of time, disclosed historically. Both claims, I argue, drive Heidegger to consider more centrally the question of freedom since they demand an account of this ‘ethical positioning’. It is argued here that ‘freedom’ originally names the condition and feature of world-disclosure that permits this ever-present possibility of transformation. This ontological freedom characterization of freedom—referred to in the dissertation as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’—is expressed as indeterminacy, contingency and non-closure in the historical presencing of a lifeworld. Were world-disclosure to be reducible to a set of knowable axioms or structures, then fundamental ontology’s claim to the temporal horizon of knowledge would be false. Hence, Heidegger argues that Being ‘evades’ Dasein’s attempt to know it fully. Chapter three concludes by arguing for the necessity of a form of historical analysis to complement and complete fundamental ontology.

Heidegger’s late work on technology and modern science was, in part, an attempt to provide a more contextual analysis, and resituate fundamental ontology within the historical and cultural location of the modern West. However, for this secondary analysis to be something more than a mere empirical history of the West, Heidegger still needs to demonstrate its connectedness to ontology and the relationship to Being. One way to do this, I argue, is to posit that some modifications at the ontic level affect the very ontological structure of our existence and modify it. This thesis requires then a *historical* ontology of freedom.
In order to provide a more robust account of historical ontology, beginning in Chapter Four I turn attention to Foucault. Although my ultimate goal is to bring Foucault into a constructive dialogue with Heidegger, it is important not to collapse the two thinkers together carelessly. As such, Chapter Four traces three lines within Foucault’s work prior to 1979 that pose significant challenges to any attempt at rendering his oeuvre commensurate with Heidegger’s. These three areas of inquiry include: (a) The historicizing of the phenomenology of experience; (b) The critique of hermeneutics, and; (c) The interrogation of the analytics of finitude and its relation to a positing of ‘original man’. Here we see that while Foucault may have in his late works arrived at similar or complementary analyses to that of Heidegger, he did so through a path of thinking that is entirely his own— driven by his own questions—many of which stand in significant tension to Heidegger’s own concerns.

In Chapter Five, three ‘terminological equivocations’ form the vehicle through which I attempt to track a key transition in Foucault’s thought from 1979 to roughly 1982. By following Foucault’s reformulations of the terms ‘conduct’, ‘experience’ and ‘thought’, I highlight the precise movement of thought that characterizes this period of his work. Again (just as Heidegger’s move to fundamental ontology was read as an activity of thought that transforms the subject), the texts are read here not merely to elucidate an argument but also to demonstrate the slow transformations in thought that guided Foucault’s work in this period. Thematically, in the transition away from the model of war towards a game-model, Foucault is demonstrated to have a primary concern for the space of freedom within his analysis. His understanding of freedom, moreover, is
taken up increasingly as a mode or style of existence, rather than as a property of the subject or a strategic form of action outside of or in resistance to power.

The final chapter of the dissertation attempts to articulate the interrelationship between an ontological analysis of selfhood and care and a historical analysis of subjectivity by drawing out critical possibilities in Foucault’s late work in relation to Heidegger. I investigate the ‘ontological presuppositions’ of Foucault’s analysis of spirituality and care of the self, arguing that his distinction between philosophy and spirituality (and their related forms of activity) commits him to an understanding of selfhood as ontologically grounded more basically in our practical involvement rather than mediated by conscious thought. The second half of this concluding chapter elaborates on how the ontology of selfhood and care implicates a historical analysis of subjectivity in the West. Foucault’s history of subjectivity, with particular reference to Descartes and Kant, is read alongside Heidegger in light of this challenge.

II: Questions of Interpretation and Influence

My primary aim here is not to provide some ‘authoritative’ reading of Heidegger and Foucault, nor of the relationship between the two, but rather to use each creatively to a particular purpose. I do not seek another tracing of the ‘Heideggerian’ influences on Foucault, and even less a synthesis of the two. Not only would such a project be presumptuous—obscuring the originality and depth of each of their work respectively—it would take us too far from the real target. My real aim is to elucidate certain indispensable features of these two figures’ thought insofar as they relate to the theme of situated freedom. Perhaps the best way to articulate what I am attempting is via the
German philosophical terms: *Auseinandersetzung* or critical encounter. It is a critical encounter because it cannot consist in merely picking up their work and attempting to fit them together. Nor can it be a wholesale acceptance of what they have to say. It is, rather, a positive encounter that leaves both partners changed.

Despite my desire to proceed more thematically, it is nevertheless impossible to avoid altogether questions of interpretation, context and influence. As such, two secondary concerns are raised in the course of pursuing the specific inquiry at hand. The first is a more general concern than that of the specific topic of freedom. It concerns the possibility of combining ontological and historical forms of critical analysis at all. This very general question receives its fullest treatment to date in the early work of Herbert Marcuse. The second concern is Foucault’s personal relationship to Heidegger and his work. I will comment briefly on each of these in turn.

II.A. Marcuse’s Gambit Reconsidered

It was the young Marcuse who first posed the question of how Heidegger’s ontological analysis in *Being and Time* might be wedded to social and historical theory. Marcuse’s early attempts at this involved bringing Heidegger together in conversation with Marxism, an effort which ultimately failed (by Marcuse’s own admission) but which nevertheless strikes at the heart of many of the same issues engaged here. While Marcuse’s *answer* may seem problematic from the present vantage point, the *question* he first posed—of how to combine ontological and historical modes of critical analysis—remains prescient. In Chapter Three I discuss Marcuse’s contributions to this problematic in more detail, arguing that ultimately the Heideggerian notion of historicity
could not reconciled with a dialectic of historical materialism since the latter cannot accept the radical contingency and indeterminacy of the former (what I refer to later on as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’).

Here I will merely signal that it is Foucault’s work (particularly his late writings) which offers the most promising route towards the kind of synthesis Marcuse sought. The possibility that Foucault might be an important, even indispensable resource for fleshing out the social and historical implications of Heideggerian ontology, and that Foucault might be employed to pick up where Marcuse left off, may seem a provocative suggestion, if not also unconventional and not immediately obvious. This idea is, in fact, suggested by passing remarks made by Marcuse in an interview late in this life. Here, Marcuse mentions that for some time he (and other students of his generation)

saw in Heidegger...a new beginning, the first radical attempt to put philosophy on really concrete foundations—philosophy concerned with human existence, the human condition, and not merely with abstract ideas and principles. However, eventually Marcuse came to feel that Heidegger’s concrete analysis of actual human existence was, in fact, a false one. He felt that because Heidegger’s primary concepts of analysis—such as Dasein—were never given specific historical and social

---

21 Recent work by philosopher Nikolas Kompridis has been highly suggestive in this manner as well. Kompridis’ Critique and Disclosure (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2006) offers a detailed critique of the rather narrow manner in which Habermas has construed the supposed unity of reason and, in so doing left the philosophical tradition of Critical Theory impoverished (in Kompridis’ analysis). As should become clear by the end of this piece, I have found much of Kompridis’ account compelling. However, it is a relatively small aside that proved highly evocative for my own work. In the context of a discussion of the Frankfurt school’s reluctance to genuinely engage Heidegger’s work in a serious way, Kompridis laments that, the early Marcuse’s genuine interest in the possibilities of combining ontological and materialist forms of critical analysis has been left to languish as a historical footnote, even though its considerable potential has barely been developed either by Heideggerians or Habermasians. (33) And, in a footnote to this passage, he adds Michel Foucault’s critical histories are probably the most successful attempt to bring about such a combination of approaches, but it is probably not quite what Marcuse had in mind. (287, ft.51)

content, they were too abstract. Marcuse concludes, acknowledging ignorance of Heidegger’s later work on technology and the age of the ‘world-picture’, that

If there is an ontology which, in spite of its stress on historicity, neglects history, throws out history, and returns to static transcendental concepts, I would say this philosophy cannot provide a conceptual basis for social and political theory.23

To this challenge, the interviewer (Fredrick Olafson) asks Marcuse of the potential for just such a rapprochement between these different forms of analysis. The interviewer asks,

Isn’t it important for a social theory to show how an individual situates himself in a certain society, in a certain condition, in a certain tradition? Isn’t it important that there be a characterization of that situation that is not just given at the level of relatively impersonal forces and tendencies, but that shows how the individual ties into those forces and tendencies?24

To this, Marcuse’s replies:

There most certainly is a need for such an analysis, but that is precisely where the concrete conditions of history come in... That is very difficult. It would open up a completely new topic. The entire dimension that has been neglected in Marxian theory, for example, how social institutions reproduce themselves in the individuals, and how the individuals, by virtue of their reproducing their own society act on it. There is room for what may be called an existential analysis, but only within this framework.25

As stated above, a more complete theoretical treatment of this is forthcoming in Chapter Three. However, here I would merely like to highlight that Marcuse’s formulation of a possible social and historical analysis that would link up with ontology could be mistaken for a description of Foucault’s own work. For, as outlined in more detail in Chapter 6, central to Foucault’s late work is the notion that processes of socialization cannot be reduced to an either/or struggle between governors and governed, between sovereign and subject. Rather, to paraphrase Marcuse from above, social institutions are reproduced in

individuals (through processes of subjectification), but it is *in virtue of* this function that subjects also act upon their social conditions. Social change then is not accounted for merely by examining the moments of ‘tactical resistance’ whereby the sovereign subject stands out, apart from and against practices of power on them and, in so doing, claims sovereign power as their own. Rather, an analysis of such change must proceed at the level of how it is that subjects modify their social conditions while simultaneously reproducing them. This simultaneity, I argue, leads Foucault to study the *modes* of being (the study of which he conceives of as a history of ethics, distinguishable from a history of moral codes) and the practices that cultivate these modes. This links up with an ontological form of analysis because the necessary simultaneity of the reconstitution/modification finds its source in an understanding of selfhood in a field of practical involvement, that is, not transcendental to the field of action and meaning itself.

**II.B. Interpreting Foucault’s Heideggerianism**

The second ‘subplot’ animating much of the discussion to follow is more specific and it concerns the extent and nature of Heidegger’s influence on Foucault. Since exploring this influence in any direct manner is not the primary focus of this study, references to it in the body of the dissertation are relatively scarce. Where I have argued for a convergence of their concerns, I have largely done so without reference as to whether this convergence is direct and intentional or merely coincidental. I have spent less time focusing on when Foucault read Heidegger, how the former was influenced by the latter, and how we ought to track this influence. Instead, I have tried to interpret the
two as independent thinkers in their own right with areas of concern that bring them into conversation over the question of freedom, finitude and ontology.

That said, questions of influence cannot be avoided altogether. In particular, where it has bolstered my reading of Foucault in the direction of questions of ontology I have used evidence of Heidegger’s influence as a kind of secondary support. In this final section of the introductory chapter, I will attempt now to situate the arguments that follow in the context of Foucault’s supposed ‘Heideggerianism’. This involves an overview of Foucault’s own statements on Heidegger as well as brief commentary on some of the literature that has focused more specifically on the question of influence. This also involves glossing over the plethora of work that attempts to bring Heidegger and Foucault together in a constructive dialogue over specific areas of concern without specific reference to questions of influence. This literature simply proceeds to compare and contrast the two on topics such as ethics, truth, critique, nihilism, art and *technē*, spatial organization and control, and epistemology.

---


31 William V. Spanos, ‘Heidegger, Foucault, and the ‘Empire of the Gaze’: Thinking the Territorialization of Knowledge,’ in Milchman and Rosenberg (eds.).
The question of Foucault’s relationship and indebtedness to Heidegger has been a
source of speculation since the former’s death. This speculation is fueled by the fact that
Foucault’s remarks on Heidegger are rare and, at times, quite puzzling. This has
produced a small (but growing) body of literature speculating on influence, but very little
consensus. The literature ranges along a full spectrum of possibilities: From those who
think Foucault was ‘essentially’ Heideggerian, to those who think Foucault was entirely
anti-Heideggerian. I will deal with each of these in turn after a quick periodization of
Foucault’s own comments. This section is intended to be more a cursory sketch that
might serve as a map for orientating through the literature; it is by no means an
exhaustive study.

Outlined in more detail in Chapter Four, Foucault first came to be influenced by
Heidegger through the latter’s influence on psychoanalysis in France. Heidegger’s work
(particularly Being and Time) made an important impact on a small group of
psychoanalytic thinkers and practitioners in Germany, whose work was eventually called
Daseinsanalysis. This group included Medard Boss (who was for a time Heidegger’s
own analyst), Ludwig Binswanger (whose Traum und Existenz contained a preface by
Foucault when translated into French) as well as Viktor Frankl and Karl Jaspers. It seems
clear that at least during the 1950s and early 1960s Foucault was heavily influenced by
Heidegger via Daseinsanalysis, introduced to France by Jean Beaufret. Even then,
Foucault seemed to look to Heidegger as an alternative to the heavy influence of Sartre in
post-WWII French philosophy (an irony, given that Sartre himself helped to popularize

---

Society for Phenomenology, Vol.27, No.2 (May, 1996)
Heidegger in this period). For instance, in comparing his own work to that of R.D. Laing, Foucault said that “[Laing] was a Sartean, I a Heideggerian.”

By the mid-1960s however, direct references to Heidegger drop off in Foucault’s work. This silence continues throughout the genealogical works of the 1970s as well, when Nietzsche appears more prominently. Where Heidegger is mentioned it is more often than not by way of contrast to Foucault’s own work. For instance, in 1966 Foucault wrote that,

We can envisage, moreover, two kinds of philosopher: the kind who opens up new avenues of thought, such as Heidegger, and the kind who in a sense plays the role of an archaeologist, studying the space in which thought unfolds, as well as the conditions of that thought, its mode of constitution.

We might question whether Foucault is correct to identity Heidegger as someone who is less preoccupied with the ‘conditions of thought’ than he. Regardless, given that Foucault was immersed in writing ‘archaeological’ works at this time, it stands to reason that he took himself to be less a ‘Heideggerian’ than at a previous stage.

By the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, traces of Heidegger begin to reappear. Since it is a general theme of the work presented here that Foucault’s late writings converge in some respects with Heidegger, the details of this reappearing influence are worked out in the body of the text. Here, however, it is worth pointing to several important markers of Foucault’s own understanding of this influence. In 1980, Foucault signaled that in some ways his studies of the modes of subjectification might be

---

33 For a biographical account of Heidegger’s influence on Foucault via the former’s debate with Sartre, see James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp.46-51.
read as complementary to Heidegger’s own analysis of technē and the modes of objectification. He wrote,

[for Heidegger, it was through an increasing obsession with technē as the only way to arrive at an understanding of objects, that the West lost touch with Being. Let’s turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject, giving it its characteristic split of truth and error, freedom and constraint. I think that it is here that we will find the real possibility of constructing a history of what we have done and, at the same time, a diagnosis of what we are.]

In 1982, a positive relation between the two was drawn not with respect to technē, but rather in regards to the question of truth. During the Collège de France lectures L’herméneutique du sujet, Foucault responded to a question from the audience saying that “only two” people in the twentieth century had sufficiently posed the question of the relationship between the subject and truth, the question ‘What is the subject of truth, what is the subject who speaks the truth?’ Those two were Heidegger and Lacan. He then went on to state “c’est plutôt… du côté de Heidegger et à partir de Heidegger que j’ai essayé de réfléchir à tout ça.”

In 1983, Foucault confirmed this connection. In commenting on the book by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics, Foucault praised the authors for saying that “Heidegger was influential” upon his work. This claim, Foucault said, was “quite true, but no one in France [had] ever perceived it.”

---

37 “It is more from the side of Heidegger and starting from Heidegger that I have tried to reflect on all this.” (Herm., p.189; translation modified.)
Finally, and most famously, in the last formal interview Foucault gave before he died, he stated,

Heidegger a toujours été pour moi le philosophe essentiel. J’ai commencé par lire Hegel, puis Marx, et je me suis mis à lire Heidegger en 1951 ou 1952; et en 1953 ou 1952, je ne me souviens plus, j’ai lu Nietzsche. J’ai encore ici les notes que j’avais prises sur Heidegger au moment où je le lisais—j’en ai des tonnes!--, et elles sont autrement plus importante que celles que j’avais prises sur Hegel ou sur Marx. Tout mon devenir philosophique a été déterminé par ma lecture de Heidegger. Mais je reconnais que c’est Nietzsche que l’a emporté. Je ne connais pas suffisamment Heidegger, je ne connais pratiquement pas L’Être et le Temps, ni les choses éditées récemment. Ma connaissance de Nietzsche est bien meilleure que celle que j’ai de Heidegger; il n’en reste pas moins que ce sont les deux expériences fondamentales que j’ai faites. Il est probable que si je n’avais pas lu Heidegger, je n’aurais pas lu Nietzsche. J’avais essayé de lire Nietzsche dans les années cinquante, mais Nietzsche tout seul ne me disait rien! Tandis que Nietzsche et Heidegger, ça a été le choc philosophique! mais je n’ai jamais rien écrit sur Heidegger et je n’ai écrit sur Nietzsche qu’un tout petit article; ce sont pourtant les deux auteurs que j’ai le plus lus. Je crois que c’est important d’avoir un petit nombre d’auteurs avec lesquels on pense, avec lesquels on travaille, mais sur lesquels on n’écris pas. J’écrirai sur eux peut-être un jour, mais à ce moment-là ils ne seront plus pour moi des instruments de pensée. (DE2, 1522)

Although this passage has been quoted often enough, what has been less noted is the question to which it is a response.

Dans ce que vous décrivez, vous avez trouvé un point de rencontre entre une expérience de la liberté et de la vérité. Il y a au moins un philosophe pour lequel le rapport entre la liberté et la vérité a été le point de départ de la pensée occidentale: c’est Heidegger qui, à partir de là, fonde la possibilité d’un discours

---

40 “Heidegger has always been for me the essential philosopher. I began by reading Hegel, then Marx, and I set out to read Heidegger in 1951 or 1952; then in 1952 or 1953, I no longer remember, I read Nietzsche. I still have the notes I took while reading Heidegger—I have tons of them!—and they are far more important than the ones I took on Hegel or Marx. My entire philosophical development was determined by my reading of Heidegger. I nevertheless recognize that Nietzsche prevailed over him [or, ‘outweighed him’ RLN]. I don’t know Heidegger well enough: I practically don’t know Being and time nor the things recently published. My knowledge of Nietzsche is much greater. Nevertheless, these were my two fundamental experiences. It is probable that if I had not read Heidegger, I would not have read Nietzsche. I had tried to read Nietzsche in the fifties but Nietzsche alone said nothing to me. Whereas Nietzsche and Heidegger— that was a philosophical shock! But I’ve never written anything on Heidegger and only a very short article on Nietzsche. I think it’s important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn’t write. Perhaps someday I’ll write about them, but at that point they will no longer be instruments of thought for me.” (FL, p.470)
a-historique. Si vous aviez eu, auparavant, Hegel et Marx dans votre ligne de mire, n’avez-vous pas eu ici Heidegger? (DE2, 1521-22)\textsuperscript{41}

So, while it seems fairly clear that Heidegger figured more prominently (or at least more explicitly) in Foucault’s very early and very late work, more or less dropping out altogether as an explicitly point of reference during the middle period, it is still not clear why this shift took place or what it means. Again, tracking this influence is not my primary concern here, so I will merely attempt to situate my own discussion to follow within the context of the already existing literature.

\textbf{II.B.2 Strong Influence}

A body of literature exists that interprets Heidegger’s influence on Foucault as being quite strong and quite consistent. Of those who think Foucault was heavily influenced by Heidegger, we must include the only two monographs devoted entirely to them, work by Stuart Elden and Timothy Rayner. The bulk of Elden’s text is concerned with developing Heidegger and Foucault’s thinking about the relationship between space and history, but it does begin with general commentary on the relationship between the two thinkers. Elden usefully surveys the literature and finally concludes that, “Nietzsche’s influence on Foucault is indeed immense, but it is continually mediated by Heidegger, and Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche.”\textsuperscript{42} Rayner’s work is also devoted to demonstrating a strong affinity between Heidegger and Foucault, particularly regarding

\textsuperscript{41} “In what you describe you have found a meeting point between an experience of freedom and truth. There is at least one philosopher for whom the relationship between freedom and truth was the point of departure for Western thought: it is Heidegger who from this point founds the possibility of an ahistorical discourse. If you had Hegel and Marx in your line of sight before, don’t you now have Heidegger?” ‘The Return of Morality,’ p.470.

their understanding of philosophy as a ‘transformative experience.’ This work is of considerable help in thinking through the issues. However, by the end of this dissertation it is hopefully clear that I take up the question in a slightly different manner than Rayner, with less emphasis placed on direct influence and less attention paid to the role of ‘philosophy’ and ‘thought’ in the formal sense. Rayner’s insistence on the specific and exemplary status of ‘philosophy’ as a transformative practice (through its capacity to grasp the historical a priori of a form of experience) still seems more generally influenced by Kant than Heidegger. In contrast, my reading looks more to pre-reflective practices as the basis of spiritual transformation. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

Another major interpreter of both Heidegger and Foucault who emphasizes their commonalities is Hubert Dreyfus. In a series of essays going back more than twenty years, Dreyfus has long set the tone for the interpretation of the Heidegger-Foucault connection. Dreyfus’ work has, rather controversially, focused on a claimed “rough parallel” between Heidegger’s notion of ‘Being’ and Foucault’s ‘Power’, as well as similarities in their epochal accounts of the history of the West. Again, while I have


found this work to be tremendously thought-provoking and original, there are many ways in which my own thinking on the topic diverges from Dreyfus’. In particular, Dreyfus’ reading of Foucault does not pay sufficient attention to the modifications in later work that make Foucault’s ‘power’ significantly different from Heidegger’s ‘Being’. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

Finally, a brief overview of other commentators who make a case for a strong Heideggerian slant to Foucault. John McCumber has referred to Foucault as a “hidden Heideggerian”\(^\text{46}\); Stephen Hicks argues that, “For all his debt to Nietzsche, Foucault’s main influence vis-à-vis the issue of nihilism is Heidegger”\(^\text{47}\); and Michael Schwartz, argues that even

\[\textit{The Order of Things} \text{ would have been impossible without the history of Being as its model.} \ldots \text{ From the notion of an episteme as the historical a priori of resemblance to the positing of the ways of knowing as prior to an deciding the character of the human knower, Foucault’s project in \textit{The Order of Things} is decisively Heideggerian.}\(^\text{48}\)

Finally, Jean Zoungrana pushes the question of influence through a rather idiosyncratic reading, suggesting that

\[\text{Dans ces textes [de Foucault], Heidegger est bien présent in absentia. Dans \textit{Les Mots et les choses}, où pourtant la présense de Heidegger est visible, c’est précisément son absence, c’est-à-dire l’invisibilité même du nom de Heidegger}\]

---


\(^{47}\) Stephen Hicks, ‘Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault: Nihilism and Beyond,’ in \textit{Foucault and Heidegger}, p.97.

\(^{48}\) Michael Schwartz, ‘Epistemes and the History of Being’ in Milchman and Rosenberg (eds.), pp.164, 168. See also his ‘Repetition and Ethics in Late Foucault,’ \textit{Telos} 117 (Fall 1999): 113-132. This is supported by the reading Tom Rockmore gives in his \textit{Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, antihumanism and being} (NY: Routledge, 1995), pp.57-58. Rockmore seems to find Heidegger’s traces in Foucault’s “attack on a certain conception of human being” (which he finds “exceedingly radical”), the critique of social sciences’ claim to objectivity and the notion of “the impermanence of the conception of human being”, all of which Rockmore derives from reliance on \textit{Les mots et les choses} as the primary ‘Heideggerian’ text. These two can be contrasted with, for example, R.Kevin Hill, who reads \textit{Les mots et les choses} as a direct critique of Heidegger. See ‘Foucault’s Critique of Heidegger,’ \textit{Philosophy Today} (Winter 1989), p.334-341.
II.B.3. Weak Influence

There is, however, another body of literature that argues just as strongly for the absence of any real Heideggerian influence in Foucault’s work. Among this group sits one of the most famous and influential interpreters of Heidegger in French philosophy: Jacques Derrida. Derrida’s comments about Foucault’s relationship to Heidegger are almost entirely dismissive of their possible positive connections. For instance, when writing in praise of his former student, Derrida commends Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe for tying the question of madness to the question of the subject

without engaging in the ‘return to the subject’ which has recently been animating Parisian conversations, and which (and this is in the best of cases, no doubt the least dogmatic and the most refined) certain authors believe they find in Foucault’s very last works.

Lacoue-Labarthe has been able to do this, according to Derrida, precisely because he has engaged in “a rigorous reading of Heidegger, an effective working-across his text on the subject of subjectivity”, which, Derrida claims, has “in every case... been carefully omitted” in other ‘Parisian conversations’. To further confirm Foucault’s place in this ‘careful omission’, Derrida writes in a footnote to the passage above that

Heidegger was almost never named by Foucault, who in any case never confronted him and, if one may say so, never explained himself on his relationship to him.

Derrida continues:

in attending to this silence [of Foucault and Deleuze, on their relationship to
Heidegger]... one obtains—allow me to say nothing on the subject here—a kind
of film of the French philosophical scene in this quarter-century. To be
deciphered: again the avoiding of the unavoidable.\(^{50}\)

And, elsewhere, states:

I suggested in a note somewhere in *Psyché* [in *Désistance*] that for a quarter
century, Heidegger was never named in any book by those who, in France, were
forced to recognize in private or in public much later that he had played a major
role in their thought (Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze, for example).\(^{51}\)

Another prominent philosopher to downplay connections between Heidegger and
Foucault is Gilles Deleuze. In his critical commentary on Foucault, Deleuze claims to
“account for the importance of Foucault’s declaration that Heidegger always fascinated
him” by suggesting that this fascination only came to Foucault

by way of Nietzsche and alongside Nietzsche (and not the other way round).
Heidegger is Nietzsche’s potential, but not the other way round, and Nietzsche did
not see his own potential fulfilled.\(^{52}\)

Deleuze concludes that,

If the fold and unfold animate not only Foucault’s ideas but even his style, it is
because they constitute an archaeology of thought. So we are perhaps less
surprised to find that Foucault encounters Heidegger precisely in this area. It is
more an encounter than an influence, to the extent that in Foucault the fold and
the unfold have an origin, a use and a destination that are very different from
Heidegger’s. According to Foucault they reveal a relation between forces, where
regional forces confront either forces that raise to infinity (the unfold) in such a
way as to constitute a God-form, or forces of finitude (the fold) in such a way as
to constitute a Man-form. It is a Nietzschean rather than Heideggerian history, a
history devoted to Nietzsche, or to *life*... \(^{53}\)

\(^{53}\) Deleuze, p.129.
Delueze’s conclusion that Heidegger only influenced Foucault by introducing him to a certain reading of Nietzsche finds support in the work of Charles Scott, Thomas Dumm, Paul Rabinow, R.Kevin Hill\(^5^4\) and Hans Sluga. Scott has written that,

> Although Foucault, in his last interview, stated that Heidegger was, with Nietzsche, the major influence on his thought and that he read Heidegger continuously during his career, Nietzsche, not Heidegger, defines the horizon from which Foucault most often takes his departure. Heidegger’s influence is apparent throughout Foucault’s writing, but it is found in a more Nietzschean context. The element of Heidegger’s thought is different from Foucault’s element, and Heidegger’s style of seriousness of mind defines not only his difference from Foucault and Nietzsche but also the element that, we shall see, most inspires and problematizes his thought.\(^5^5\)

Rabinow writes,

> The few scattered comments in the later years are, I am convinced, the product of our encounters more than anything else... Foucault’s encounter with Heidegger was in the existential Dasein stage; no doubt he read everything else and learned things from this great philosopher but he was certainly no Heideggerian.\(^5^6\)

Thomas Dumm echoes this analysis,

> Heidegger’s influence on Foucault is immense and crucial to understanding his work, but the Heideggerian influence on Foucault is mediated by Foucault’s understanding of Nietzsche.\(^5^7\)

Todd May, for his part, has not commented directly on the question of influence, but has at least suggested a mutual antagonism in the approaches of the two philosophers. He

argues that what Foucault presents is not only not ontology, but that it is specifically antithetical to ontological questioning. May writes,

what Foucault is after in holding this question [‘What is our present?’] to be the organizing principle of his life’s work is neither an ontology nor a metaphysics. It is not a matter of delving into the Being of the present, but rather of asking the more pedestrian and yet more urgent question: What are things like for us today? In what kinds of situations do we find ourselves, in what kinds of predicaments and with what kinds of troubles? What are the constraints that (immediately apparent to us or not) bind us, the oppressions that beset us? And how did we let all this happen?  

Finally, Hans Sluga’s careful historical reconstruction of Foucault’s reading leads him to conclude that

[Foucault] never attributed an equally crucial role to Heidegger [as Nietzsche]... we can, at least, conclude that Nietzsche weighed more for him in the end than Heidegger...He did admittedly say that his reading of Heidegger had determined his whole philosophical development, but this is not the same as saying that the substance of Heidegger’s thought had determined his course of development, or that he had held Heidegger’s positive doctrines at any time, and it certainly does not mean that he remained in any sense a Heideggerian for the rest of his life.

II.B.4. Sources of Influence: Klossowski and Althusser

This opens up another (minor) controversy in Foucaultian scholarship. The debate focuses not only on the extent to which Heidegger influenced Foucault, but also how and when this influence came about. As already noted above, most scholars of the topic agree that Heidegger likely first came to Foucault’s attention through the *Daseinsanalysis* group. This fits best with Foucault’s own periodization of his reading. What has been left less explored is how this influence via psychoanalysis was inflected

---

and altered by Foucault’s interaction with other intellectual communities at the same time.

Since Foucault himself suggested that Heidegger influenced him largely by changing his reading of Nietzsche, we are lead to think that the Nietzsche lectures may have been a more central text for Foucault than Being and Time. This is also supported by an examination of the influence of Pierre Klossowski on Foucault, something which has remained relatively quiet in the literature on Heidegger’s influence. In 1969 Klossowski published Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux, a collection of writings decades in the making with which Foucault was already deeply familiar and by which he was highly influenced. In 1971 it was Klossowski who translated Heidegger’s two volume study of Nietzsche, which some argue led to an even greater “revival of French interest in Nietzsche... above all on Michel Foucault.” This certainly suggests a high level of influence mediated by Klossowski and, in particular, his reading of Nietzsche. Yet the periodization of this does not seem to fit. For if Heidegger came to influence Foucault through Klossowski’s translation of the Nietzsche lectures, then the height of Heidegger’s influence should have been in the late 1960s, through the 1970s, precisely the time when references to Heidegger began to drop off in Foucault’s own work.

A route of influence that begins earlier and has also been relatively unexplored is through Louis Althusser. It might seem unlikely that Althusser, a structuralist Marxist, would have had much positive to recommend in Heidegger to his young students. Yet

---

61 Evidence that Foucault was already very familiar and influenced by Klossowski can by found in his 1964 essay ‘The Prose of Actaeon,’ EW2, pp.123-135. Foucault once described Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux, in a letter to Klossowski, as “the greatest book of philosophy I have read in addition to Nietzsche himself.” quoted in ‘Translator’s Preface’ to Pierre Klossowski, Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
62 Rockmore, 130.
there is one feature of Heidegger’s work which was undoubtedly important to Althusser and, through him, may have influenced Foucault. This was Heidegger’s anti-humanism and his critique of Sartre’s existentialism. Althusser himself brings together these threads in commenting on the intellectual climate of the time. He writes that Heidegger’s *Letter to Jean Beaufret on Humanism* “influenced my arguments concerning theoretical antihumanism in Marx.” As a result of this influence, Althusser was “confronted by what was being read in France, in other words, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, and much later on Foucault, and above all Cavaillé and Canguilhem.”63 Althusser’s remarks suggest a line of influence relatively unexplored in the scholarship. While an emphasis on influence via *Daseinsanalysis* points to *Being and Time* as a primary text for Foucault, and an emphasis on Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche as primary suggests the importance of the Nietzsche lectures, Althusser’s suggestion that it was the centrality of ‘theoretical antihumanism’ in the French reception of Heidegger that carried the most weight points to ‘The Letter on Humanism’ and perhaps ‘The Age of the World Picture’ as central.64

To say, then, that there is disagreement amongst scholars on the extent and nature of Heidegger’s influence on Foucault, indeed even the source and timing of it, would be to considerably understate the issue. Fortunately, all this need not be definitively resolved (even if that were in principle possible). For my part, I can only observe that Foucault’s direct engagement with Heidegger appears to peak in his earliest writings and his latest writings and that even at these points it was always a creative, non-dogmatic,

---


64 This reading of influence is supported by Hans Sluga, *op cit.*, and Samuel Ijsseling, ‘Foucault with Heidegger,’ *Man and World*, 19(1986): 413-424 appears to contradict, for instance, Paul Rabinow’s claim that “Foucault’s encounter with Heidegger was in the existential Dasein stage.” *Op cit.* at 56.
distinctly *Foucaultian* engagement. Any further comments on influence are reserved for the body of the text.
The purpose of this chapter is to reconstruct the preparatory analytic of freedom articulated in *Being and Time*. I chose the terms ‘reconstruct’ and ‘preparatory analytic’ for specific reasons. First, those familiar with Heidegger may immediately raise the objection that *Being and Time* is not a text on political philosophy traditionally understood and, even more to the point, the concept of freedom is given no extended discussion within the text. Secondly, to the extent that freedom is considered within the text it surely belongs to Division I, which Heidegger himself describes as ‘preparatory analysis’.

Both objections are accepted. However, I do not take them to be the final word on the issue and neither offer definitive reasons why a ‘reconstruction’ of an analysis of freedom cannot be done with *Being and Time*. By this I mean that the text, insofar as it lays out Heidegger’s basic and most comprehensive statement on human subjectivity and agency, is the definitive backdrop to any other writings he might have offered on the concept of freedom specifically. Any reading of freedom in other, later texts has to run through *Being and Time* first. The fact that the text does not speak directly about the concept (at least not to name it as such) does not mean that the text is not central to the question of freedom. Indeed, as I will argue below, freedom is theorized indirectly within the text, though it tends to be presented under the guise of authenticity [*eigentlichkeit*] and potentiality-for-being [*Seinkönnen*]. In these two terms, we see Heidegger prepare the basis of his analysis of freedom as (a) a condition of worldly
activities (potentiality) and (b) an ethical-positioning in relation to such conditions (authenticity). Secondly, even though the analysis of freedom offered in *Being and Time* is preparatory in the sense that it does not aspire to a fully comprehensive or fundamental ontology, it is nevertheless essential. Such analysis may not be complete, but it is necessary. In this sense, I naturally concede that the analysis of freedom in *Being and Time* is preparatory.

The importance of Heidegger’s preparatory analytic of freedom is that it provides the basic framework for understanding why potentiality is the ground of Dasein’s being. If we can demonstrate that potentiality is fundamental to Dasein’s constitution, not as a metaphysical ‘thing’, but rather as an existential *a priori*, then several important developments for thinking about freedom follow:

1) potentiality-for-being is foundational and, as Charles Taylor phrases it, prior to any attempt at the “ontologizing of rational procedure”⁶⁵ (as seen in (neo)Kantian rationalism);

2) since potentiality-for-being is claimed as an existential *a priori*, it is not a feature of human will or cognition, and cannot be understood through a reconstruction of ‘pure’ mind, will or non-heterogeneous agency. It can only be accounted for through an understanding of human agency as fully ‘embedded’ within lifeworlds that, while always structured by factical conditions, are also always open to modification over time;

3) freedom, then, can be re-conceptualized as an open-ended activity of ethical self-transformation through lifeworld modification, rather than

---

submission to norm or rule governance as determined by ontologized reason, and;

4) the resulting conception of freedom will be non-teleological in the sense that it will not develop historically towards the predetermined telos of rational maturity (understood as a self fully submissive to the structure of reason itself).

To approach a text as large, complex and unwieldy as *Being and Time*, one must begin by limiting the scope and making conceptual distinctions that separate out the task at hand. As stated above, I propose only a targeted reading of *Being and Time* (that is, not a comprehensive one), aimed specifically at making explicit how preparatory work towards a theory of situated freedom and its antonym is developed within the text. In the narrow Heideggerian sense of the term, I am proposing an Interpretation [Auslegung] of situated freedom—a theoretical account that makes explicit through a demonstration of the as-structure [Als-Struktur] of freedom which was always operational (in this case, within the larger project of a fundamental ontology) but remained only implicit.

The conceptual distinction I will apply to the text in order to separate out the task at hand is between experiential, existential and ontological levels of analysis. What this means requires a brief explanation of Heidegger’s phenomenology. Part of Heidegger’s project in *Being and Time* is to replace Husserl’s bracketing of the experiential lifeworld [Lebenswelt] by foregrounding it and making it central not only thematically (as an object of study), but also methodologically (as a means of study). Thematically, Heidegger wants to demonstrate that knowledge is grounded in the experiential lifeworld and that
abstract, self-reflective theoretical knowledge is merely derivative of the more basic and seamless kind of knowing that enables everyday life, named as Understanding \([\text{Verstehen}]\) by Heidegger. If this is true, however, Heidegger would need to make this rather abstract and theoretical point by beginning from, and grounding it in the everyday experiential lifeworld. This insight is the basis of Heidegger’s reformulation of phenomenology. Heideggerian phenomenology means beginning from the \textit{experiential} world. The experiential level of analysis is the description of everyday moods, states-of-mind and practices. Examples from \textit{Being and Time} are numerous and include, for instance, Being-with \([\text{Mit-Sein}]\), Dread \([\text{Angst}]\) and Fear \([\text{Furcht}]\).

From these particular experiential modes of being and acting, Heidegger then demonstrates how we can, through reflection on their meaning, reveal a new level of analysis: the \textit{existential}. When we use an aspect of the experiential lifeworld, reflect on its \textit{as-structure} (e.g., what is fear \textit{as/qua} fear?), we can open up a new level of questioning—the existential—and begin to question the \textit{as-structure} of oneself (i.e., what is Dasein \textit{as/qua} Dasein?). To employ an example, we can observe the transition from experiential to existential in the following: I see a large dog snarling at me and feel afraid (experiential). Later, I reflect on the experience and wonder, \textit{‘why} was I afraid?’, \textit{‘what was the meaning} of this fear?’, \textit{‘what does it reveal} about me?’ Heidegger suggests that, upon reflection, I would note that this fear reveals that I have a certain concern for my own existence, and that the world \textit{matters} to me. These characteristics of Dasein’s existence that serve as the \textit{a priori} conditions of possibility for the particular experiential moods (such as fear or dread) Heidegger calls ‘existentials’. Even though existentials stand \textit{a priori} to the experiential level of knowledge, we would be mistaken to see them
as fixed properties of Dasein’s being in the way, for example, brittleness or solidity are properties of glass. Rather, as Heidegger clearly states,

> Die an diesem Seienden herausstellbaren Charaktere sind daher nicht vorhandene ‘Eigenschaften’ eines so und so ‘aussehenden’ vorhandenen Seienden, sondern je ihm mögliche Weisen zu sein und nur das.” (SZ §9, 42 emphasis added)\(^66\)

Generally speaking then, personal experience can, when reflected upon, lead to insights into the existential \textit{a priori} conditions which structure Dasein’s concernful relations with the world and itself.

From this second level of analysis (existential), we can then move to the third and most basic: the ontological. Once I have inquired into what it means for me to be, and possibly even provided some rudimentary answer to this (Heidegger’s answer to the question of what it means for Dasein to be is Care, to be explicated below), we can then possibly even move to the final, most basic question: what does it mean for anything to be? Or, simple, what is Being? This final level of analysis Heidegger calls ‘fundamental ontology’, and it is the primary aim of \textit{Being and Time} to provide an answer to this question. The first two levels of analysis (the concern of Division I) are merely preparatory in the sense that they only hint at the final question (dealt with in Division II) and do not directly answer it, though they are necessary in the sense that they demonstrate the foundational role of the experiential lifeworld to all knowledge.

I draw attention to this three-fold structure of analysis in \textit{Being and Time} not only to help explicate the text, but also to explain and justify the narrowing of my own inquiry. Since I am concerned with explicating situated freedom and its antonym as they implicate \textit{human lives}, I am almost exclusively concerned with the first two levels of analysis (the

\(^{66}\) “Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not ‘properties’ present-at-hand of some entity which ‘looks’ so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case \textit{possible ways for it to be, and no more than that.” (BTa §9, 67 emphasis added)
experiential and the existential). This also speaks to my method of narrowing the bulk of my reading to Division I.

I. Freedom between Actuality and Potentiality

Heidegger begins his analysis of the Seinsfrage—or, the question of the meaning of being—with oneself, with Dasein. Since we enter into the very question of being through the level of the experiential (that is, through experiences we have with everyday life and not beginning with theoretical or abstract contemplation), “Das Sein dieses Seienden ist je meines.” (SZ §9,41) The entry point for analysis of all Dasein, and indeed for all Being, is reflection on my own personal existence. This does not mean that each should conflate their personal experience with the existential condition of all. Rather, it refers only to the initial object of inquiry which, through careful study, can reveal a more general level of analysis. It also demonstrates that hermeneutic self-inquiry is the initial methodology of analysis. One begins an inquiry through a realization and interpretation on the meaning of one’s own personal experience in the world. This integrates practical and theoretical knowledge since theoretical knowledge is itself taken to be merely a translated and refined version of everyday understanding, one which strives above all to preserve the way meaning makes itself known to us in everyday practices. Finally, in terms of content, this exposes the fact that we, as Dasein, are capable of reflecting upon our own existence. Hence, Heidegger’s other famous (and famously misunderstood) claim that “Das ‘Wesen’ des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz.” (SZ §9,42) Dasein, by its very definition, is one that is (defined in terms of its possible

---

67 “The Being of any such entity is in each case mine.” (BTa §9, 67)
68 “The ‘essence’ of Dasein is its existence.” (BTa §9, 67)
ways of existing) and one who has the capacity to reflect upon this existence. In later works, Heidegger highlights Dasein’s capacity to stand ‘out’ from its own various everyday modes of being by often hyphenating Ek-istenz, drawing attention to the etymological root of Ekistenz in the Latin existere: to stand out.

So what does the capacity to ‘stand out’ from one’s everyday experiential lifeworld and reflect upon it (thus moving to the existential level of analysis) tell us about freedom? This capacity for existential reflection opens up a new space between actuality and potentiality and it is in this space where Heidegger’s conception of freedom has its grounding. Before proceeding directly to this, however, it is first necessary to trace the line of Heidegger’s argument in order to demonstrate how he attempts to ground the claims with respect to freedom. I will do this by briefly looking at the first existential analytic—‘worldliness’ or ‘worldhood’ [Weltlichkeit] (SZ §9-27)—before proceeding to the second—Understanding [Verstehen] (SZ §25-38).

II. Existential Analytic I: ‘Worldhood’ (§9-25)

The first and most general of the existentials discussed in Being and Time is that of Being-in-the-world [In-der-Welt-sein]. In this section of the text, Heidegger sets himself two tasks. First, he must determine what it means to Be-in-the-world. As we shall see later, in the discussion of the second existential, for Heidegger an analysis of the meaning of something always refers to it as an object of Interpretation [Auslegung], or detached theoretical consideration that attempts to link the as-structure of an object of inquiry (that is, what the thing is as that thing, and not as something else—i.e., in relation to its determinative, defining characteristic within the given scope of the inquiry) to its
fore-structure (that is, the background field of practices and knowledge required to make such an object appear as an object of inquiry at all). In the special sense that Heidegger uses the term then, he needs in this first section to expose the ontological meaning of Being-in-the-world.

Secondly, Heidegger needs to demonstrate that this mode of being is an existential a priori. This means that he would need to demonstrate that no inquiry could begin at all if it weren’t for the already existing mode of being known as Being-in-the-world. If Being-in-the-world can be demonstrated to be the presupposition of knowledge, then it will be grounded as an existential a priori.

In order to get at what he means by Being-in-the-world, and how he grounds this as an existential a priori, Heidegger suggests dissecting the two parts to the phrase and studying them independently. He begins with ‘Being-in’ as an existential of Dasein. To understand Being-in, Heidegger distinguishes between two senses of the preposition ‘in’. On the one hand, ‘in’ denotes location and spatial relationship—Heidegger’s examples including stating that the water is ‘in’ the glass, or the garment is ‘in’ the closet (SZ §12, 54). However, the preposition ‘in’—like other prepositions such as ‘at’ and ‘on’— may also refer to a state of engagement, a mode of being, as in the sentence: “He is hard at work.”, or “She is in love.” Heidegger highlights this second sense by noting the etomological connection between ‘in’ and “innan-, wohnen, habitare, sich aufhalten” (SZ §12, 80). It is this second sense of the term ‘in’ (related to engagement, habitation or dwelling with) that Heidegger demonstrates “In-Sein dagegen meint eine Seinsverfassung des Daseins und ist ein Existenziel.” (SZ §12, 54) The emphasis Heidegger places on

---

69 “from ‘innan’—‘to reside’, ‘habitare’, ‘to dwell’” (BTa §12, 80).
70 “Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being; it is an existentiale.” (BTa §12, 79)
our necessarily involvement (our ‘Being-in’), we will see, leads to his later understanding of ‘freedom’ as a particular mode or manner of involvement, engagement, or Being-in-the-world, rather than a detachment from such worldly conditions.

The ‘World’ in Heidegger’s existential sense does not merely refer to our physical surroundings or environment. Such a natural scientific mode of seeing the world as a set of physical parts, Heidegger argues, “muß sie [die Struktur der Welt] voraussetzen und ständig von ihr Gebrauch machen.” (SZ §12, 58) The world, therefore, refers to the totality of meaningful relations that one always finds oneself within. My environment [Umwelt] is a relational field in which things and humans come before my awareness, change me and are changed by me. It is the minimal condition for the very possibility of Dasein (that is, a being that questions its own existence) since one cannot not have a ‘world’ in this sense because anything that is rendered intelligible at all must already exist within some field of meaning. As such, ‘world’ is not meant to be taken as an ontic category—as a ‘thing’ that ‘exists’. Rather, it is an existential a priori of Dasein’s mode of being. Dasein, by its very constitution is always in (engaged, busy and concerned with) a world (totality of meaningful relations with other beings). The a priori mode of being that permits anything at all to matter to us, or to be rendered intelligible is this Being-in-the-world.

71 “must presuppose and constantly employ [the structure of the ‘World’, i.e., as existential]” (BTa §12, 84).
72 Although not discussed in this section, it is perhaps important to note that as seemingly obvious as this claim is (i.e., that one is always already in a world), Heidegger is actually making a rather bold statement contrary to the Cartesian and Kantian tradition of thought. First, if Being-in-the-world is a priori and grounds knowledge, then ontology is prior to epistemology. Second, the entire problem of a subject-object distinction is dissolved as such a subject must already be in a world that it is engaged in for it to even encounter an object as a problem for knowledge. More will be said about this in latter sections of the thesis relating Heidegger and Foucault to Kant.
Within this world, Dasein encounters other beings in two basic ways: ready-to-hand and present-at-hand (SZ §15-16). Ready-to-hand [Zuhanden] is the primary mode of relating to other beings, in both chronology and importance. Dasein simply moves through the world encountering other beings within a seamless relational field. Other beings are ‘equipment’ [Zeug], not in the pejorative sense of an object to be used, but rather as a functional being whose existence for Dasein is linked intimately to its use and relationship to other beings—including Dasein itself. This explains why “ein Zeug ‘ist’ strenggenommen nie” (SZ §15, 68), why one always encounters a ‘relational totality of equipment’—ein Zeugganzes. It is only in certain special cases, such as malfunction, temporary breakdown or unavailability of equipment, that something is encountered as present-at-hand [Vorhanden]:

Damit Erkennen als betrachtendes Destimmen des Vorhandenen möglich sei, bedarf es vorgängig einer Defizienz des besorgenden Zu-tun-habens mit der Welt. (SZ §13, 61)

In this case, other beings are encountered more as a series of detached objects. This is the mode in which a mechanic would approach a broken-down car, or a medical scientist might look at skin cells. It is important to note even at this early juncture that Heidegger is not normatively privileging the mode of ready-to-hand. It is not ‘wrong’ to encounter things as present-at-hand. In fact, it is an important way of relating to other beings and obviously opens up new possibilities for knowledge (as, for example, in the natural sciences). What is wrong is to think that the mode of present-at-hand is primary (as is

---

73 Note that, in later works, Heidegger diversifies this rather simplistic (though nevertheless helpful) dualism of modes of relating to other beings. In the lectures between 1935-1936, for example, Heidegger expands the basic distinction between ‘thing’ and ‘equipment’ to include also ‘art’ and ‘work’.

74 “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment.” (BTa §15, 97)

75 “If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a deficiency in our having-to-do with the world concernfully.” (BTa §12, 88)
explicit in Descartes (SZ §18-24) and, as Heidegger will later argue, implicit in Kant), or to think that one can only encounter the world as present-at-hand. Heidegger is reminding us in this section that even when we relate to ‘X’ as present-at-hand, there is a whole field of other beings which we are simultaneously relating to as ready-to-hand and it is only because we are relating to these other things as ready-to-hand that viewing ‘X’ as present-at-hand is even possible.

Finally, Heidegger extends the logic of the existential analytic to include spatiality [Raumlichkeit] (SZ §22-24). If our primary mode of relating to the world is ready-to-hand, then spatiality of Dasein’s being is also a priori established. It is only because we exist within a spatial field which we unconsciously know and seamlessly negotiate that we can relate to things as near to us and available qua equipment.

In all these existentials (ready-to-hand, present-at-hand, spatiality), Heidegger has attempted to demonstrate that epistemological theories which attempt to reconstruct the conditions for knowledge from the standpoint of a worldless, noumenal self will necessarily miss the crucial element of embodiment’s foundational place in knowledge and subject formation. These theoretical models occlude the mutual relatedness of the acquisition of knowledge, on the one hand, and the positioning or ethical involvement of the subject of knowledge, on the other hand. This means that the theories of freedom which I have described in Chapter One as ‘transcendental’ and ‘teleological’ will not be sufficient. It is one thing to say that a subject must be able to ‘appropriate’ norms and rules of conduct (to accept or refuse them as an act of ‘free will’). It is another to say that the already existing ethical relations between entities establishes the ontological field in which a subject can emerge at all. In the first instance, the norms are there, at an exterior
distance, and the task is to find a way of appropriating or refusing them, establishing a practical relationship to them. The epistemological frame is presupposed in this encounter, one in which a subject encounters moral norms and must find his way within them. In Heidegger’s analysis, however, we are Da-sein, located-being, which means that there is an ontological relationship between oneself and one’s world, not merely an epistemic. What is required is a theory of situated freedom, in which the existential commitment, or ethical involvement of the subject of knowledge is fore-grounded and interpreted in its relation to selfhood and, in particular, agency.


To this point, Heidegger has sought to establish that Dasein exists always already within a world of meaning, that it relates to this world in two basic ways—ready-to-hand (primary) and present-at-hand (secondary)—that its being is embodied spatially and that it is capable of asking the question of the meaning of this existence. Now we must demonstrate more specifically what kind of world Dasein finds itself in and how, if at all, it can modify this world. This requires working through Heidegger’s concept of ‘Understanding’ [Verstehen]. Despite the relative brevity of the section on Understanding, it is clearly of central importance to Heidegger’s work generally and, in particular, to any attempt to reconstruct an analysis of human freedom. It is in this section that Heidegger begins to develop a theory of selfhood. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly for the question of freedom, it is here that Heidegger makes the distinction between the mode of the actual and the mode of the possible. Since in the
context of the question of freedom the two parts of this analytic (selfhood and understanding) are so intimately related, I will deal with them together.

Understanding is so important to an analysis of freedom because it grounds Dasein’s potentiality-for-being [Seinkönnen]—the capacity to be something other than what is given to one in the present. In order to appreciate the radical nature of potentiality, we must approach it from the actual first. Heidegger introduces the mode of the actual through the term Befindlichkeit (SZ §29). The term is notoriously difficult to translate, but the most literal translation is ‘state or condition in which one finds

---

76 Befindlichkeit is difficult to translate from German to English, as both major translations of Sein und Zeit attest. First, Befindlichkeit has an obvious, common usage in everyday German, as in the question: Wie befinden Sie sich?, or How are you?/How are you doing? This means that what could literally be rendered as ‘How do you find yourself?’ is often just translated as ‘How are you?’, the key here being that the verb Sich Befinden is made synonymous with Sein when translated, which, in this context, is clearly problematic. If one were to translate Sich Benfinden into French, one would at least have recourse to Se trouver.

Second, there are few words in English that can convey a general state of being without importing a psychological or cognitive emphasis. The Macquarrie and Robinson translation (BTa) renders Befindlichkeit as ‘State-of-Mind’. This is, to my thinking, a good example of importing a cognitive emphasis which Heidegger clearly does intend. By ‘cognitive emphasis’, I mean that Befindlichkeit clearly does not refer to a purely mental state. Joan Stambaugh (BTb) translates Befindlichkeit as ‘Attunement’. Although this is certainly an adequate translation of the term, it runs up against the difficulty of being differentiated from uses of Gestimmtheit, which is ‘Having a Mood’ or, sometimes translated also as ‘to be attuned’.

We can see this problem arise in translating, for example, the following passage: “Die Gestimmtheit der Befindlichkeit konstituiert existenzial die Weltoffenheit des Daseins.” (SZ §29, 137). The Macquarrie and Robinson translation is: “Dasein’s openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind.” (BTa §29, 176), while Stambaugh translates: “The moodedness of attunement constitutes existentially the openness to world of Da-sein.” (BTb §29, 129). The word ‘attunement’ has been reversed between the two translations. In Macquarrie and Robinson it is used for Gestimmtheit, while for Stambaugh it is used for Befindlichkeit, which necessitates a new (and awkward) term ‘moodedness’ for Gestimmtheit.

I am not an expert on German, let alone translation, but it seems to me that the most literal rendering of Befindlichkeit would be ‘the state or condition one finds oneself in’. Although this is clearly long and awkward in English, it is important in the context of the specific discussion above to carefully distinguish between a state-of-mind, a mood, and a more general, precognitive condition in which one finds oneself (which includes not only mental states, psychological conditions, but also the world, its equipment, things and other human beings).

The importance of this is clear when we take, for example, another important section: “Seiendes vom Charakter des Daseins ist sein Da in der Weise, daß es sich, ob ausdrücklich oder nicht, in seiner Geworfenheit befindet. In der Befindlichkeit ist das Dasein immer schon vor es selbst gebracht, es hat sich immer schon gefunden, nicht als wahrnehmendes Sich-vor-finden, sondern als gestimmtes Sichbefinden.”
oneself’. Since this is too long and cumbersome a phrase, I shall employ ‘disposition’ here, though it is important not to think of this in terms of a cognitive or psychological state. Quite the opposite. Heidegger makes clear that we do not ‘have’ a disposition; it ‘has’ us. Therefore, it is only through a ‘disclosive submission’ [erschließende Angewiesenheit] or acknowledgement that “der her Angehendes begegnen kann.” (SZ §29, 137-138) There are three main features or inner capacities latent within disposition that can be revealed to us. They are the capacity to disclose (1) Being-in-the-world; (2) ‘thrownness’, and; (3) circumspective concern [umsichtig besorgende], defined as the ability to become affected [Betroffenwerdens] by the world because it matters to Dasein (SZ §29, 137).

We have already sketched out ‘Being-in-the-world’ and observed it as a mode of being-in which other beings exist in a relational totality that matters for Dasein. Since the fact that beings ‘matter’ for Dasein demonstrates that Dasein already has a relation to them, it also demonstrates that Dasein is always already in a Mood [Stimmung], not in the sense of a psychological state or a feeling, but in the sense of a general condition that draws together all the beings within a field of intelligibility and meaning. The notion of a Mood purposefully links, for Heidegger, three components of a fundamental ontology normally seen as analytically distinct in the epistemological tradition: (a) the acquisition of knowledge, (b) the ethical-positioning of the subject of knowledge, and (c) the

---

77 “we can encounter something that matters to us.” (BTa §29, 177)
78 “Das Gestimmtsein dezieht sich nicht zunächst auf Seelisches, ist selbst kein Zustand drinnen, der dann auf rätselhafte Weise hinausgelangt und auf die Dinge und Personen abfärbt.” (SZ §29, 137). Translation: “Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons.” (BTa §29, 176)
disclosure of a domain of objects about which knowledge claims can obtain. In this sense, therefore, ‘I’ do not have a mood. Rather, ‘I’, together in a relation with other beings proximal to me, find myself in a mood:

In der Befindlichkeit ist das Dasein immer schon vor es selbst gebracht, es hat sich immer schon gefunden, nicht als wahrnehmendes Sich-vor-finden, sondern als gestimmtes Sichbefinden. (SZ §29, 135 emphasis added).  

Since being in a mood is the presupposition for awareness of oneself and the world, it is the means by which one comes to perceptive awareness and thus is ‘ursprüngliche… vor allem Erkennen und Wollen und über deren Erchließungstragweite hinaus erschlossen.” (SZ §29, 136) This is why Dasein can never be fully free of moods [stimmungsfrei] (SZ §29, 136). One of the characteristics of our actual disposition is then this ‘being within a mood’ and the fact that this mood is the means by which we are ‘brought before ourselves’ whether explicitly or not.

The second major characteristic of our disposition is ‘thrownness’ [Geworfenheit]. For Heidegger, the term ‘thrownness’ ‘soll die Faktizität der Überantwortung andeuten’ (SZ §29, 135) — it is the characteristic of our disposition “darin sich die Faktizität phenomenal sehen läßt.” (SZ §38, 179) So, thrownness is that characteristic of our disposition that permits Facticity [Faktizität] to come to awareness.

What is ‘facticity’ as differentiated from factuality? Heidegger explains facticity in two important sections:


---

79 op. cit. at 11.
80 “primordial … prior to all cognition and volition, and beyond their range of disclosure.” (BTa §29, 175)
81 “is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over.” (BTa §29, 174)
82 “in which facticity lets itself be seen phenomenally” (BTa §38, 223).
Dasein ist, nennen wir seine Faktizität. Die verwickelte Struktur dieser Seinsbestimmtheit ist selbst als Problem nur erst faßbar im Lichte der schon herausgearbeiteten existenzialen Grundverfassungen des Daseins. Der Bergriß der Faktizität beschließt in sich: das In-der-Welt-sein eines ‘innerweltlichen’ Seienden, so zwar, daß sich dieses Seiende verstehen kann als in seinem ‘Geschick’ verhaftet mit dem Sein des Seienden, das ihm innerhalb seiner eigenen Welt begegnet. (SZ §12, 56.)

Faktizität ist nicht die Tatsächlichkeit des factum brutum eines Vorhandenen, sondern ein in die Existenz aufgenommener, wenngleich zunächst abgedrängter Seinscharakter des Daseins. (SZ §29, 135)

If our disposition did not have this characteristic, then facticity could not be seen phenomenally and thus could not be rendered intelligible or the object of study. Since we can know at least the fact of our facticity, we know that our condition has such a feature.

In summary then, the mode of the actual— the disposition, state or condition in which Dasein always already finds itself [Befindlichkeit]— is characterized by:

(a) existence within a relational totality of beings that matter (a world), which is;
(b) shown to us through the mood we are always already in, and;
(c) conditioned by a facticity that can be shown phenomenally to Dasein’s awareness.

IV. Mode of the Possible

83 “Dasein understands its ownmost Being in the sense of a certain ‘factual Being-present-at-hand’. And yet the ‘factuality’ of the fact [Tatsache] of one’s own Dasein is at bottom quite different ontologically from the factual occurrence of some kind of mineral, for example. Whenever Dasein is, it is as a Fact; and the factuality of such a Fact is what we shall call Dasein’s ‘facticity’. This is a definite way of Being [Seinsbestimmtheit], and it has a complicated structure which cannot even be grasped as a problem until Dasein’s basic existential states have been worked out. The concept of ‘facticity’ implies that an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.” (BTa §12, 82)

84 “Facticity is not the factuality of the factum brutum of something present-at-hand, but a characteristic of Dasein’s Being—one which has been taken up into existence, even if proximally it has been thrust aside.” (BTa §29, 174)
Where Heidegger’s existential analytic in *Being and Time* becomes most interesting for a study on freedom is when we move beyond actuality and into the realm of potentiality. To this point, we have attempted to demonstrate the main characteristics of the realm of the actual (Being-in-the-world, mood, thrownness and facticity). However, rather than define Dasein merely by what it *is* in its determinate facticity, Heidegger insightfully demonstrates that Dasein’s meaning also consists in what it *can be*. One of the unique characteristics of human being is that we need not rest content with things merely as they are, but rather also have the capacity to alter our present and live differently. The first step in this consists in the coming to awareness of our potentiality-for-being [Seinkönnen]. The question that Heidegger must confront then is what it means precisely to ‘come to awareness’ of this potentiality. My reading of this tradition is that a ‘coming to awareness’, or a ‘realization’ of something such as potentiality consists not in a theoretical or conceptual grasp of the theme in the abstract. Rather, it is to make this a feature of oneself, to *be in this manner*, such that potentiality is made manifest through a working out of possibilities latent within worldly activities in which one is engaged.

Grounding an analysis of possibilities or potentiality within the existential analytic would require that Heidegger demonstrate potentiality to be *internally related* to the basic conditions for knowledge itself. In other words, the challenge is to begin from everyday questioning of our world and arrive at a full demonstration of how possibilities for living differently are already presupposed within such a questioning. How is it possible to ground potentiality this way?
Heidegger argues that for one’s being to arrive as a theme of inquiry (that is, to move from experiential to existential levels of analysis) one must already have a pre-conceptual understanding of the possibility of not-being. I cannot question my own existence except through recognition of the possibility of my non-existence, that is, the recognition that my existence is not necessary, not logically required; it is not the only possible way for things to be. Just as we moved from the experiential to the existential, we can extend the argument from the existential level to the level of fundamental ontology and state that, likewise, to inquire into the significance of Being means recognizing the possibility of non-Being (or nothingness). It is to ask the question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Within the question is an implicit understanding of the internal relation between actuality and potentiality, or at least that knowledge of actuality is conditional upon knowledge of potentiality. Thus, to even grasp the question of one’s own existence (or of Being itself) as a question, one must already be aware of possibilities that diverge from the mode of the actual. Hence Heidegger’s claim regarding the internal relation between understanding and potentiality-for-being:

“Verstehen ist das existenziale Sein des eigenen Seinkönnens des Daseins selbst, so zwar, daß dieses Sein an ihm selbst das Woran des mit ihm selbst Seins erschließt.” (SZ §31, 144)85

Heidegger grounds this priority of potentiality through a demonstration of the operation of understanding itself. The surprisingly short section of Being and Time devoted to Understanding [Verstehen] (§31) is, therefore, of great importance to our

85 “Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentiality for Being; and it is so in such a way that this Being discloses itself what its Being is capable of.” (BTa §31, 184)
analysis here. As David Gelven argues, Understanding is a crucial category within the structure of *Being and Time* for three reasons:

(a) it provides an account, within the existential analytic, of how it is possible that Dasein is aware of its own possibilities;

(b) it provides the basis for Heidegger’s theory of interpretation, which is particularly important as Heidegger clearly considers the whole of *Being and Time* to be an *Interpretation* of the *Seinsfrage*, and;

(c) it provides the basis for Heidegger’s theory of freedom, further elaborated upon elsewhere.\(^86\)

V. Understanding and Projection

Understanding [*Verstehen*] has three basic characteristics: as-structure, fore-structure and meaning. A detailed analysis of each is not necessary here, though we must briefly sketch out each in order to understanding the relation between understanding and projection, in turn demonstrating how Heidegger attempts to ground the priority of potentiality within the structure of understanding itself.

The As-structure [*Als-Struktur*] of a thing refers to the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ [*Um-zu*], defined in its assignment, reference, or relation [*Verweistung*] (SZ §15, 68) to other things (in this case, Dasein itself) that makes a thing appear as said thing to Dasein’s everyday understanding. It is the purpose or utility of a thing within the relational world of meaning that makes up our everyday realm of coping activity. The

---

purpose, or ‘in-order-to’ of a thing is always already present within its constitution as an object of inquiry for Dasein because it could not appear as said thing except within what Heidegger calls *ein Zeugganzes* (*SZ* §15, 68)—literally, ‘stuff/thing/equipment-entirety’, translating here as ‘totality or general field of things’. This demonstrates Heidegger’s earlier point that our understanding of the world is based in the mode of ready-to-hand. One does not encounter objects in their bare isolation and then *add on* a meaning to them. Rather, ‘objects’ (studied in the mode of present-at-hand) are always first ‘things’ (functional and experienced as ready-to-hand). Interpretation [*Auslegung*] merely makes explicit the meaning of the thing which was already grasped by Understanding through the working out of possibilities already latent within everyday use of things as equipment:

> Die Ausbildung des Verstehens nennen wir Auslegung… In der Auslegung wird das Verstehen nicht etwas anderes, sondern es selbst. Auslegung gründet exisitzal im Verstehen, und nicht entsteht dieses durch jene. Die Auslegung ist nicht die Kenntnisnahme des Verstandenen, sondern die Ausarbeitung der im Verstehen entworfenen Möglichkeiten. (*SZ* §32, 148)\(^87\)

The second characteristic of Understanding is fore-structure [*Vor-Struktur*]. If Interpretation merely makes explicit the already possessed understanding of a thing, then the aspects of knowledge which prefigure the interpretation can be referred to as the fore-structure. The fore-structure of understanding has three parts: (a) fore-having [*Vorhabe*], (b) fore-seeing [*Vorsicht*] and (c) fore-grasping [*Vorgriff*] (*SZ* §32, 150). Fore-having refers to the ‘totality of involvement’ [*Bewandtnisganzheit*] that serves as the background

---

\(^87\) “This development of the understanding we call ‘interpretation’… In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.” (*BTa* §32, 188-189)
to conscious thought. It is the pre-conceptual, embodied practices of relating to things and other selves that makes functioning within a realm of meaning possible; the totality of the habitualized patterns of thinking and acting that make everyday coping possible. Importantly, such habitualized practices are non-cognitive. That is to say, they do not consist in an explicitly or implicitly held theory or picture of the world in order for them to function and, as such, “braucht nicht durch eine thematishe Auslegung explizit erfaßt zu sein” (SZ §32, 150) in order to ‘give’ them meaning or make them functional.

Rather, such practices are held together by nothing more than repeated activity, pointing to the immanence of our understandings of the world to our practical activities.

Fore-seeing refers to the knowledge or reflective standpoint one has when the thing in question is explicitly thought as a thing. When something occurs to detach the thing in question from its functional relation to the world of equipment (as in cases of breakdown), a basic knowledge of the thing and its relation to other things is mobilized. This knowledge need not be made explicit in the sense of theorization or articulation. Rather, it refers only to a basic cognitive awareness of the thing as said thing which allows one to recognize, for example, an instance of breakdown. If my car doesn’t start in the morning, I might instinctively look under the hood. This demonstrates a basic knowledge of what a car is and how it works, but it does not require any explicit thinking about the purpose or as-structure of a car (i.e., I need not ask: what are cars?).

The third aspect of the fore-structure of understanding is fore-grasping. This is the explicitly thought level of analysis. It refers to the detached standpoint of the observer who is attempting to analyze a thing in relation to its purpose or as-structure. It functions in terms of a specific conception (a quasi-hypothesis) by which the as-structure

---

88 “need not be grasped explicitly by a thematic interpretation” (BTa §32, 191).
is made explicit. Thinking again of the broken down car, it is the point at which I stand back from my car, thinking about what might be wrong with it that prevents it from functioning as a car (thus, for example, a car that doesn’t start might make a great art installation, but it does not function as a car).

The third aspect of Understanding (along with as-structure and fore-structure) is meaning [Bedeutsamkeit]. Meaning refers to the awareness of the as-structure of a thing. To understanding the meaning of a thing, we must grasp it in terms of its function and utility within the relational totality of equipment that Dasein engages with during everyday coping. It is to understand the thing as that thing (SZ §32, 151). Since Dasein alone can think about and make explicit the as-structure of a thing, only Dasein can comprehend meaning (by the same token, only Dasein can be meaningless). No theoretically held position can have meaning therefore, except as a making explicit of an already existing functional relationality of things as they are employed (ready-to-hand) by Dasein. Propositional meaning (the meaning of a statement or proposition) is, therefore, derivative of experiential, pre-cognitive meaning embedded within a form of life. One does not ‘add’ meaning to a thing in its isolation; rather, one encounters it already existing within a field of involvement:

Sie wirft nicht gleichsam über das nackte Vorhandene eine ‘Bedeutung’ und beklebt es nicht mit einem Wert, sondern mit dem innerweltlichen Begegnenden als solchem hat es je schon eine im Weltverstehen erschlossene Bewandtnis, die durch die Auslegung herausgelegt wird. (SZ §32, 150) 89

Meaning, therefore, is a mode of being—“ein Existential des Daseins” (SZ §32, 151)—and thus must be analyzed at the level of ontology, not merely epistemology. The

---

89 “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do no stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.” (BTa §32, 190-191)
importance of this insight (particularly as a break with neo-Kantian rationalism) will become central to our argument about freedom in the sections to follow.\(^{90}\)

How does the structure of Understanding ground the priority of potentiality?

Heidegger addresses this question specifically in a dense, important passage, worth quoting at length:


In this case, I will offer my own translation in text so as to facilitate the particular interpretation I am advancing:

Why does Understanding always press forward into possibilities, whatever the essential dimensions of that which can be disclosed in it? It is because the understanding has in itself the existential structure of what we call Projection. It [Understanding] projects Dasein’s Being upon its ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ [Worumwillen] and, equiprimordially, upon its Meaning as the worldhood of its current world. The projection-character of understanding constitutes the Being-in-the-world with regard to the disclosedness of its ‘there’ as a ‘there-in-potentiality-for-being’. Projection is the existential condition of being by which

---

\(^{90}\) Important to note and refer back to at a later stage. Connect to the neo-Kantian rationalist fallacy of attributing meaning to propositions—understanding meaning as something ‘added on’ to understanding when interpretation is explicitly theorized.
factual potentiality-for-being has its ‘manoeuvre room’. And as thrown is Dasein thrown into the kind of being that is projection. Projection has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, according to which Dasein would arrange its Being, but, rather, as Dasein, it has already projected itself and, as long as it is, it is projecting. Dasein always understands itself and always will understand itself, as long as it is, in terms of possibilities. Furthermore, the projection-character of Understanding is such that the Understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects—that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such a manner would take away from what is projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind; whereas projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it be as such. As projecting, understanding is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it is its possibilities as possibilities. (my translation, with reference also to BTa §31, 184-185 and BTb §31, 136).

How can we take this difficult passage and understand it through the question of freedom as potentiality for being, grounded in the very structure of understanding? First, Heidegger is demonstrating that it is only through the projection of possibilities that the as-structure of a thing can be made explicit and thus, meaning can be revealed.

Projection [Entwerfen] refers to the fact that one’s everyday coping is always organized by a ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ [Worumwillen] that makes particular plans within this realm possible. When one interrogates the meaning of a thing, Projection makes explicit the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ that organizes the realm which rendered the thing intelligible in the first place. It is important to note here that the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ which organizes a realm of practices, equipment or language is not given by Dasein. Rather, Dasein always finds itself within this world which already has a comportment towards certain practices and languages of meaning. This is why Heidegger cautions us against thinking of projection as a ‘plan’ that Dasein might have which points to the future. Rather, the relationship is the other way around: projection ‘has’ Dasein. What Dasein can do, however, is make this structure explicit and, in so doing, unveil meaning. That is
why Heidegger can say that Understanding only comes about and the world only has meaning, *because* of Dasein’s capacity to project possibilities without falling into a decisionistic theory of meaning whereby humans simply ‘place’ meaning onto things in the world. The world exists prior, complete with a structure of *Worumwillen*. Dasein, through the inherent projecting function of understanding, brings this meaning to light.

If Understanding (the embodied knowledge that makes coping in the actual functional) is grounded in Potentiality-for-Being, then the two are always internally related. That is, our present lifeworld of meaning and practices already presupposes possible alternative modes; if it did not, such a world would have no meaning at all. These ‘possible alternatives’ contained within the mode of the actual, Heidegger calls *Spielraum*, our ‘leeway’, ‘room to maneuver’ or ‘space of play’ (*SZ* §31, 145).

*Spielraum* is, at least insofar as we are concerned with reconstructing an analysis of freedom in *Being and Time*, a central concept that has received little or no attention from commentators to this point.91 The concept is central to the development of a theory of situated freedom in the sense that I have been using the term because, as Hubert Dreyfus has noted, it introduces the idea of a space of possibilities that constrains Dasein’s range of possible actions without in any way determining what Dasein does… The range of possibilities that Dasein ‘knows’ without reflection, sets up the *room for maneuver* in the current situation. This is the commonsense background of circumspection… Thus the existential possibilities open in any *specific* situation can be viewed as a subset of the *general* possibilities making up significance. They reveal what in a specific situation it makes sense to do.92

---

91 Stambaugh, for instance, glosses over the term completely in her translation of the passage quoted above from §31, rendering “Der Entwurf ist die existenziale Seinsverfassung des Spielraums des faktischen Seinkönnens.” as “Project is the existential constitution of being in the realm of factical potentiality for being.” (*BTb* §31, 136)

We can see within this concept of ‘room to maneuver’ an important insight into thinking about freedom and its antonym that cannot be accounted for under theories that attempt to reconstruct meaning and action from the standpoint of disembodied minds. Spielraum is both the field of governance over meaningful action and thought and simultaneously the range of possibilities within which Dasein can meaningfully do otherwise. Thus, it both enables and constrains meaningful action. What I have referred to previously as a theory of freedom taken up from the standpoint of the constituting subject will, I suggest, be unable to account for the meaningful range of possibilities, nor the capacity to modify this range slowly over time, since meaning cannot be reconstructed from the position of the autonomous, willing subject. Meaning is feature of relations between entities within a world, according to Heidegger, not a function of Dasein’s intention or of mere physical conditions:


Die Möglichkeit als Existenzial bedeutet nicht das freischwebende Seinkönnen im Sinne der ‘Gleichgültigkeit der Willkür’ (libertas indifferentiae). (SZ §31143-144)\textsuperscript{93}

\textsuperscript{93} “The Being-possible which Dasein is existentially in every case, is to be sharply distinguished both from empty logical possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand, so far as with the present-at-hand this or that can ‘come to pass’. As a modal category of presence-at-hand, possibility signifies what is not yet actual and what is not at any time necessary. It characterizes the merely possible. Ontologically it is on a lower level that actuality and necessity. On the other hand, possibility as an existentiale is the most primordial and ultimate positive way in which Dasein is characterized ontologically. As with existentiality in general, we can, in the first instance, only prepare for the problem of possibility. The phenomenal basis for seeing it at all is provided by the understanding as a disclosive potentiality-for-Being.
Thus, we can see that what can possibly appear to Dasein as a choice is determined neither by merely logical or physical possibility, but rather by the Spielraum of a given lifeworld—the range of the existentially possible.\textsuperscript{94} Dasein’s possibilities are governed by the existentially meaningful room to maneuver, or Spielraum that, while open-ended and modifiable, is nevertheless limited in scope.

This means that an investigation into how something is made a ‘meaningful’ possibility is required. The fact that the mode of the actual exists in relation to a realm of potentialities means that the question of the meaning of the actual is related to an inquiry into the potential. Stated in ordinary language, to truly know the meaning of $X$, I must first recognize that $X$ is merely one way for things to be. Only then can I ask: of all the possible ways for things to be, what does it mean that the actual is defined by this one, particular mode called $X$? If I can even ask this question, I have already raised the background understanding from implicit to explicit themes of knowledge of (a) finitude and (b) potentiality.

Finitude [\textit{Endlichkeit}] refers to the recognition of the possibility of our own not-being. When we come to awareness of the fact that we will not always be (that we will pass away in death), only then can we fully grasp the significance of the present mode of being. Thus, awareness of potentiality is internally related to the revelation of our finitude. Finitude, in turn, is the condition of possibility for the awareness of temporality, and this realization is the basis of freedom:

\begin{quote}
Das Vorlaufen aber weicht der Unüberholbarkeit nicht aus wie das uneigentliche Sein zum Tode, sondern gibt sich \textit{frei für} sie. Das vorlaufende Freiwerden \textit{für}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{94} Dreyfus, \textit{op. cit.}, 190-191.
Authentic being then, is defined by awareness of the fact that we are not fully determined by the mode of the actual. Rather, Dasein is grounded more primordially in the realm of the potential, though not because the actual is normatively inferior or ontologically less real (in fact, in a strict metaphysical sense, of course, the actual is more real than the potential). Rather, Dasein is grounded more primordially in the potential because awareness of the characteristics and meaning of the actual are conditioned upon a prior awareness of possibilities for being otherwise. This awareness, as I have emphasized elsewhere, is more dependent on a specific ethical positioning of the subject in relation to the world than a exercise of pure reason in its historical invariability. The ethical positioning of oneself within a given set of factical conditions and activities is, for Heidegger, the condition for realizing the latent potentiality within such conditions. Hence his linking of becoming with an ethical engagement in the world— what Heidegger will explicitly refer to as ‘freedom.’

The meaning of our existence, of our lives, does not lie only in what we are, but also consists in what we can be, or what we could have been. Furthermore, true judgment of the value of what we are can only come about through analysis in relation to

---

95 “Anticipation, however, unlike inauthentic Being-towards-death, does not evade the fact that death is not to be outstripped; instead, anticipation frees itself for accepting this. When, by anticipation, one becomes free for one’s own death, one is liberated from one’s lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time in can authentically understand and choose not to be outstripped.” (BTa §53, 308) Here, Heidegger is arguing that the recognition that death cannot be by-passed, both in the sense of an event that cannot be avoided but also as something which cannot be surpassed in importance to determining meaning for living possibilities. Stambaugh’s decision to translated ‘unüberholbar’ as ‘not-to-be-by-passed’ rather than ‘not to be outstripped’, perhaps better preserves these two senses of the term insofar as Heidegger is using it to characterize death existentially.
what we might have been. To define oneself merely through the realm of the actual is to comprehend oneself merely as an object, akin to all other objects (such as rocks or trees). This would be to see oneself as a static ‘fact’, rather than a ‘factual being’ (referred to above, see SZ §12, 56)—something conditioned by facts but also by an understanding of them and, through this, a capacity to think and act beyond them. Interpreting oneself exclusively as present-at-hand (as an actual entity) is to basically see oneself as and object and therefore as other, as not one’s own—un-eigen-tlich. This is why Heidegger defines this mode of analysis (over-determination by the actual) using the term: uneigentlich, most often translated as ‘authentic’. It is through the ‘authentic/inauthentic’ distinction that we finally arrive at a more explicit theorizing of freedom.

VI. Freedom and the Authentic / Inauthentic Distinction

If it is true that Dasein is defined not merely by its actuality, but also by its potentiality, that Dasein always has an understanding of this potentiality (even if implicitly), and that potentiality is always free and primordial in relation to actuality, how does the problem of freedom arise at all? Doesn’t it appear as though freedom is so structurally necessary to the basic comportment of Dasein that it cannot be otherwise (i.e., Dasein can only exist as a free being) and therefore, following Heidegger’s own logic, the question of freedom cannot even arise since, at least in this particular case, there is no potentiality (i.e., no alternative mode of being). If this is true, the critic might object, freedom is (a) emptied of all content, (b) mere assertion of the will of Dasein, and/or (c) impossible to account for even as a problem for Dasein’s reflection.
In order to understand Heidegger’s response to this, we must look at how we constructs the relationship between authentic and inauthentic being. My argument will be that in his early work (up to and including *Being and Time*), Heidegger understood inauthentic being to be a state of non-freedom even within the necessary understanding of potentiality that grounds freedom for Dasein. Before proceeding onto this argument, however, it is necessary to understand what Heidegger means by ‘Authenticity’.

Despite the fact that potentiality is embedded within the very structure of Dasein’s Understanding, Heidegger does not think that we understand or exercise this potentiality in many, or even most, cases. Rather, Dasein is ‘entrapped’ within its own unawareness of potentiality such that possibilities are foreclosed. Central to Heidegger’s analysis of freedom then, is the insight that *having* possibilities and *awareness* of possibilities are internally related. Dasein always ‘has’ possibilities other than the mode of the actual. However, the tendency to shy away from this truth and deny one’s potentiality means that Dasein ‘falls away’ from its true (potential) self and becomes enmeshed within the mode of the actual. This is inauthentic being.

In order to clarify what is meant by the internal relation between knowing and having possibilities, perhaps an example is in order. We might think of Wittgenstein’s example from *Culture and Value*. There, he writes, “Ein Mensch ist in einem Zimmer *gefangen*, wenn die Tür unversperrt ist, sich nach innen öffnet; er aber nicht auf die Idee kommt zu *ziehen*, statt gegen sie zu drücken.” In the idiom I am employing here, we might clarify by saying that the man is not imprisoned (actually), but rather is entrapped (through a non-awareness of the potentiality for being otherwise). Thus, in Heidegger’s

---

96 “A man is imprisoned in a room if the door is unlocked, opens inwards; but it doesn’t occur to him to *pull*, rather than push against it.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 42. My translation, emphasis in original.
parlance, the man’s mode of being while in the room was inauthentic but not false. In other words, it is not enough to be in fact free. You must also be aware of this condition in order to actually possess any possibilities beyond what you would have if you were in fact detained.

The next question that must be confronted is: How does this ‘falling away’ from awareness of possibilities occur? How does Dasein ‘become’ inauthentic in its relation to itself and others?

Authenticity [Eigentlichkeit] is a controversial and much misunderstood term within Heidegger’s philosophical vocabulary. Certainly, eigentlich can be translated as ‘authentic’. However, recalling the etymological connection between eigen [own] and eigentlich, we can see that Heidegger really means to draw our attention to this mode of analysis as essentially self-awareness and its antonym (uneigentlichkeit) as essentially self-estranging. That is, the mode of analysis that defines selfhood only by the actual is a condition of ‘not-one’s own-ness—un-eigen-lich—as an object away from oneself.

Part of the reason this term has been hard to understand in terms of its relation to Heidegger’s general philosophical project is its ambiguous use. On the one hand, ‘authentic’ refers to a more pure, genuine, original, or true status. This is the sense of authentic that is employed when one inquires into the ‘authenticity’ of a painting, for example. The inquiry is attempting to find out if the painting is the original or a forgery. The other sense of the term, although related, is not quite the same. Another way in which we might employ ‘authentic’ is with respect to ownership or personal connection. In this case, authenticity refers not to a return to an original condition, but rather an
acceptance or ‘ownership’ over one’s choices, the fact that a particular vocation, for example, is self-determined and that this is unique to oneself (i.e., related to me as a unique person, different from others). This draws the meaning of *eigentlich* closer to ‘properly’, in the sense in which I might say that something is ‘properly mine’.  

The first set of distinctions (genuine/not genuine) translate as *echt* and *unecht* in German. This is quite different from the second set: *eigentlich* and *uneigentlich*. The second sense of the term (as ‘made-one’s-own’) refers to the relationship to the form of life, not the form of life itself. Thus, no particular mode of being can itself be *authentic* or *inauthentic*. Rather, we can have an only have an *authentic* or *inauthentic* relationship to the mode of being we find ourselves in. An authentic relationship to this mode of being would be one in which we recognize it as existing within a range of possibilities—a situation wherein we realize that this particular mode of being could be otherwise and therefore, if we continue to live it, we have *chosen* to live this way; it was not necessary or obligatory.

Heidegger’s use of ‘authenticity’ remains almost without exception within the second register. Several textual clues demonstrate this. First, Heidegger explicitly connects *eigentlich* to *eigen*, meaning ‘own’, ‘personal’, ‘peculiar’ or ‘unique’. When the terms ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ are first introduced, he cautions against reading them in their colloquial senses and reminds the reader specifically that “diese Ausdrücke sin dim strengen Wortsinne terminologisch gewählt” (*SZ* §9, 43). Often, when the terms are deployed, Heidegger goes to lengths to remind us of the connections between *eigentlich*, *zueigen*, and *eigen*, such as when he states of Dasein: “es seinem Wesen nach

---

97 The connection to ‘properly’ and ‘property’ [Eigentum] I owe to conversations with Brad Bryan.
98 “these expressions have been chosen terminologically in a strict sense” (*BTa* §9, 68)
mögliches *eigentliches*, das heißt sich zueigen ist.” (§9, 42; emphasis added)99  This means that while Heidegger is using the term ‘authentic’, he is employing it not in its everyday use, but more in the technical sense, meaning ‘done on one’s own’ (from the Greek *autos* for self).100

The second set of textual supports for this reading comes from Heidegger’s use of the concept of ‘false authenticity’ and when he argues,

in dem, woran solche Stimmung sich nicht kehrt [clearly a mode of inauthentic being, RLN], ist das Dasein in seinem Überantwortetsein an das Da enthült. Im Ausweichen selbst ist das Da erschlossenes. (SZ §29, 135)101

The very fact that Heidegger acknowledges the possibility of false authenticity, or of an unveiling through evasion, demonstrates that the authentic/inauthentic distinction is not meant to be conflated with moral evaluations of ‘right/wrong’, ‘good/bad’ or ‘true/false’ modes of living. Heidegger writes that authenticity, as well as inauthenticity, “können wiederum echt oder unecht sein.” (SZ §31, 146)102

It is important to note that, despite the obvious normative weight of the terms within everyday language, ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ are not moral terms within Heidegger’s system. That is to say, while ‘authentic being’ may turn out to be normatively privileged (as many commentators argue), it is not normatively privileged simply because it is authentic. The authenticity of a mode of being is related only to whether Dasein has acknowledged that that particular mode of being exists within a range of possibilities, that as Dasein we have possibilities. I can let the factual conditions of

---

99 Dasein is “essentially something that can be authentic—that is, something of its own.” (BTa §9, 68). The Stambaugh translation has rendered “sich zueigen ist” as “belongs to itself.” (BTb §9, 40)
101 “this means that even in that to which such a mood pays no attention, Dasein is unveiled in its Being-delivered-over to the ‘there’. In the evasion itself the ‘there’ is something disclosed.” (BTA §29, 174).
102 “can be either genuine or not genuine.” (BTA §31, 186)
my world—my relations with other things and other subjects—determine who I am, thus submitting myself to the realm of the actual. Or, I can acknowledge that, as Dasein (a being who can question the meaning of its own existence) I always have possibilities, thus it is I who determines my existence. Authentic being is a being ‘made as one’s own’, while inauthentic being is a being in which I do not acknowledge my possibilities and define myself only through the impersonal relation to all other Dasein—“the They” [Das Mann].

Many interpreters of Heidegger have uncritically equated ‘the They’ to the social body, arguing that Heidegger is advocating a break from social bonds in some kind of radical existential break from others and our obligations to them. Such commentators have even argued that this basically anti-social attitude accounts (at least in part) for his participation in the Nazi Party and implicit (if not explicit) defense of the Führerprinzip during his tenure as rector of the University of Freiburg in the academic year of 1933-34. There is no doubt that Heidegger himself drew a connection between the concept of ‘Das Mann’ in Being and Time to the rejection of democratic principles by the National Socialist party. However, what is not clear is whether the concept of ‘the They’, originally situated within its context of 1927 can actually be conflated with the demos, or whether there is a necessary connection between it and any particular politics (fascist or otherwise).

When read within its original context, ‘the They’ clearly does not mean ‘the social body’ itself, nor does accepting its role as a concept within Heidegger’s system entail accepting any radically anti-social (or anti-democratic) ethics. ‘The They’ refers to a characteristic of the self—not an objective body of people or set of social relations. It
should always be remembered that *Das Mann* is an impersonal pronoun, not to be
equated necessarily with a large social body. Rather, in this specific context, *Das Mann*
refers to the characteristic within Dasein to depersonalize itself—to see oneself as
essentially determined by things which are not ‘one’s own’ (i.e., by our factical
conditions). Certainly, other Dasein are a part of the factical conditions that we can
depersonalize ourselves into—defining ourselves merely by what others say or do.
However, this externalization of the basic meaning of our selfhood is possible not
because other people press themselves upon us, or because social relations are necessarily
oppressive. Rather, it is possible only because within Dasein is the capacity to
externalize the meaning of oneself, to depersonalize it and allow it to be determined by
something (or someone) else. Thus, the difference between authentic and inauthentic
being is not that authentic being is detached from others while inauthentic is engaged.
Rather, it is a difference of how Dasein relates to others— the mode or manner of
comportment with which Dasein engages its world— whether one looses sight of the fact
that its possibilities are never exhausted by the range presented to it in a given Lifeworld.

In fact, far from stating that consideration of others is necessarily self-destructive,
Heidegger attempts to demonstrate that it is an existential. Consideration for others is
established, for Heidegger, as an existential since he argues that any particular mode of
relating (loving, hating, sharing, etc.) requires *a priori* the basic capacity to consider
others as something different from a mere object, that is, as another Dasein. The *a priori*
capacity to consider others as other instances of Dasein comes before any particular
consideration of specific people; it makes such consideration possible. This *a priori*
Heidegger refers to as ‘Being-with’ [*Mit-Sein*].
As mentioned above, Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology begins from the experiential level. That is, he first attempts to define the experiences of humans as they reveal themselves to the inquirer. After this has been done, we can use the experience to open up a new level of inquiry—the existential—by asking what conditions would have to exist in order to make the experience possible at all. Employing this transcendental analysis allows Heidegger in this case to ground the *a priori* of Being-with as the potential to relate to other Dasein in a manner different from our relations to things. Since things and equipment are defined in terms of their as-structure—the ‘for-the-sake-of-which’—this naturally opens up the question of *who it is* the equipment exists for. Acknowledging the existence of other Dasein is necessary to complete the structure of Understanding because other Dasein are that *for which* equipment is defined. Since other Dasein are defined via a existential analytic (i.e., in relation to the question of my own existence), we can demonstrate that placing them within a separate category of relations is necessary. Thus, we can show that other Dasein do not exist in the world for me in the same way that equipment does. The possibility of acknowledging this exists within the structure of each Dasein’s experience, is thus *a priori*, and demonstrates that authentic *Dasein* could not (by definition) mean a Dasein that did not care for others. Consideration for others is an *a priori* possibility that makes actual respect for others possible, but it also makes possible *forgetfulness* of this special relation and the losing of oneself to others—in other words, non-self-aware-being, or inauthenticity [Uneigentlichkeit]. Potentiality stands prior to the authentic/inauthentic distinction therefore; it is an existential while the authentic/inauthentic distinction merely refers to a particular stance towards this existential:
Die Idee der Existenz bestimmten wir als verstehendes Seinkönnen, dem es um sein Sein selbst geht. Als je meines aber ist das Seinkönnen frei für Eigentlichkeit oder Uneigentlichkeit oder die modale Indifferenz ihrer. (SZ §45, 232)\textsuperscript{103}

The primary feature of authenticity then is self-awareness of possibilities within a set of relations to other beings. Authenticity does not, however, relate to potentiality-for-being as an existential of Dasein. What is clear is that potentiality is always a background condition for any possible understanding (referred to, and discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, as the ‘ontological ground’ of freedom).

\section*{VII. Critique of Authenticity}

We can see then that despite Heidegger’s attempt to carefully limit the use of the authentic/inauthentic distinction and emphasize its relationship to eigen, the terminology nevertheless contains significant ambiguities so as to make it problematic. The use of authenticity as a concept within Heidegger’s preparatory analytic of freedom has definite limitations.

First, despite various attempts to detach the concept from notions of originary purity, Heidegger himself frequently displays nostalgia for some primordial, original form of human being that has been corrupted or perverted over time, something for which he has been rightly criticized. This classic thesis of alienation and decline however, relies upon positing a philosophical anthropology in which a more ‘true’ version of humanity existed at some period in time—a claim which would be over-determined within

\textsuperscript{103} “We have defined the idea of existence as a potentiality-for-Being—a potentiality which understands, and for which its own Being is an issue. But this potentiality-for-Being, as one which is in each case mine, is free either for authenticity or for inauthenticity or for a mode in which neither of these has been differentiated.” (B\text{Ta}, §45, 275)
Heidegger’s general system since it cannot be grounded by the existential analytic and is not necessary to sustain the other insights.

Second, Heidegger’s use of the authentic/inauthentic distinction leaves great deal of ambiguity regarding the historical status of freedom. To clarify what I mean, we might ask Heidegger: does Dasein in all places, at all times, exhibit the same degree of inauthentic being? If so, then the degree to which Dasein is inauthentic is invariable, which would support the thesis that inauthenticity refers more to a characteristic of selfhood (i.e., determination by social relations) rather than a quality of relations that can be altered over time. However, it is clear that Heidegger thinks inauthentic being has become more common under conditions of modernity. This would imply that Dasein can become more or less authentic over historical time, meaning that inauthenticity is a condition which, while one might never totally escape, can be transformed. What is required then is more than the rather abstract claim, derived though it may be from a fundamental ontology, that Dasein has a tendency to fall into modes of inauthenticity with corresponding ossifying effects. Additional to this would be a historical analysis of the modes of ‘making inauthentic’, the modes by which Dasein is overdetermined by its actuality and occludes its potentiality-for-being, as well as a historical analysis of the modes of attunement which make realization of potentiality possible. Such I complimentary study, I suggest, points us towards the kind of work Foucault engaged in during his later period.

The next chapter will deal with how Heidegger attempted to alter his account of freedom qua authenticity (awareness of potentiality for being) in his middle writings. I will argue that authenticity was too ambiguous a concept (both with respect to the
question of purity vs. originality and with respect to the question of its historicity) and that developments within Heidegger’s middle period point to a clearer, more comprehensive account of situated freedom.
there is no freedom without a field.

- Merleau-Ponty 104

Although Heidegger claimed the work presented in essays from his middle period, such as *On the Essence of Ground*105, *On the Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*106, *On the Essence of Truth*107, and *Schelling: On the Essence of Human Freedom*108, was a continuation of and commensurate with the project undertaken in *Being and Time*, surely one central theme must have come as a surprise to readers. Particularly unusual is Heidegger’s claim in these works that the problem of Being is ultimately a problem of freedom (*GA* 31, 300), or the even more sweeping assertion that philosophy itself is only realized in search of freedom.109 After all, the

---

105 ‘Vom Wesen des Grundes’ was written in 1928, published in *Festschrift für Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag*, (Halle, 1929) and again in *GA* 9. Historical information on this and other lectures and courses is from Alfred Denker, *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger’s Philosophy* (Landam, Mayland & London: Scarecrow Press, 2000) unless otherwise noted.
106 ‘Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit: Einleitung in die Philosophie’ was offered as a course in 1930 and published in *GA* 31.
107 ‘Vom Wesen der Wahrheit’ was probably Heidegger’s most important piece from the publication of *Being and Time* to the end of WWII; it was certainly the piece that occupied most of his time. It was originally offered as a lecture at Marburg in 1926, then again in Karlsruhe 1930. This version was published in *Nachlese zu Heidegger*, Guido Schneeberger (Hrsg.) (Bern: Suhr, 1962). A revised version of the essay was delivered in Bremen 1930 and Freiburg 1930, published in *GA* 9. A course by the same title was offered in 1931-32, given as a lecture in Dresden in 1932 and published in *GA* 34. Another revised version of the topic was offered as a course in 1933-34, published in *GA* 36/37, and published by Heidegger in 1943 (Frankfurt am Main).
108 ‘Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit’ was offered as a course in 1936 and was published twice: (Tübingen, 1971) and *GA*42.
109 “To be sure, philosophizing—and it especially—must always proceed through a rigorous conceptual knowledge and must remain in the medium of that knowledge, but this knowledge is grasped in its genuine content only when in such knowledge the whole of existence is seized by the root after which philosophy searches—in and by freedom.” (*MFL*, 18)
term is barely mentioned in *Being and Time* and, to the extent that freedom has historically tended to connote a capacity of the will for spontaneous causality, it seems almost entirely antithetical to the ontological analysis of the *Seinsfrage*.

The unusual place of freedom in Heidegger’s middle period may account (at least in part) for the wildly divergent and contradictory interpretations of what he truly meant by the term. As Fred Dallmayr has pointed out, “No theoretical aspect of [Heidegger’s] work has occasioned more controversy and heated debate than his attitude toward freedom.”\(^\text{110}\) On one end of the interpretive spectrum, Heidegger has been “reproached for having carried the modern concept of freedom to an absurd point and thus for having promoted a blind and arbitrary decisionism,” a reading facilitated by the early Sartre’s appropriation of the existential analytic in *Being and Time*. On the other side, however, Heidegger is also often “claimed to endorse a complete dismantling or eradication of human freedom and willing, and thus to sanction a deterministic fatalism.”\(^\text{111}\) This objection has been advanced, for instance, by Habermas.\(^\text{112}\) There are even a few commentators, such as Leo Strauss, who have raised *both* accusations.\(^\text{113}\)

My primary aim in reading Heidegger’s middle works is not, however, to establish a definitive reading. Rather, it is to demonstrate that at the very least Heidegger makes an important, even indispensible contribution to thinking about freedom because he focuses the issue properly. Specifically, Heidegger was correct in suggesting that in thinking about the question of freedom we cannot avoid thinking *ontologically*. For my

---


\(^\text{111}\) *Ibid*.


\(^\text{113}\) Cited and discussed further in Dallmayr, p.208.
purposes here, an ‘ontological’ analysis is one that affirms the idea that knowledge claims about the world are also interpretations of what sorts of entities there are to be known and, simultaneously, a certain ethical positioning of the subject of knowledge in relation to the world so interpreted. In saying that Heidegger focuses the issue properly then, I mean that a thesis on freedom always contains within it an implicitly or explicitly held understanding of the fundamental framework or field of conditions within which meaningful actions may be actualized, an understanding of the kinds of entities that exist and act within this field, and the range of possibilities within which they operate.

The reading offered proceeds along four lines. First, I will track how Heidegger recast the previous discussion (Chapter Two) in terms of freedom. I argue that he moved away from the language of authenticity and resoluteness characteristic of *Being and Time* in part because of the solipsistic overtones connoted by such terms—interpreted as they sometimes are as reducible to an existential individualized self-commitment without ethical content. Instead, Heidegger moved towards speaking of freedom, not in terms of a property of the subject, nor as an end state to be achieved historically, but rather as an ethical relationship to the modes of revealing or practical involvement in which we find ourselves. Second, I parse Heidegger’s use of the predicate ‘free’, demonstrating its polysemic use during this period of his work. Particular attention is paid to how freedom is understood as both a *condition* of world-disclosure and as a *relationship* to this condition. The third section of the chapter analyzes how Heidegger’s changing understanding of freedom away from authenticity and resoluteness towards a relationship to the field of one’s practical involvement required an opening up of the historical conditions for just such a relationship. I argue that Heidegger became increasingly
concerned not only with demonstrating *that* our self-understandings derive from modes of practical involvement, but also *how* particular modes of revealing may conceal their own conditions of appearance, thus concealing the latent possibility of transformation from within. An analysis of such modes, referred to here as various modes of (self) concealing, requires a complementary form of historical analysis to that of Heidegger’s original ontology. The chapter concludes with a more detailed elaboration of this transition from fundamental to historical ontology with particular reference to Marcuse and Foucault.

I. The Field of Freedom

Among his contributions, Heidegger offers the most sustained and systematic elaboration since Marx of the notion that our primary experience of the world is not mediated by consciousness but is instead a practical relation. This means, for him, that our theoretical world-views, as well as the forms of subjectivity that comprise our sense of selfhood are actually the outgrowth of a more basic mode of technological-practical involvement in the world, or what he called the ‘modes of revealing’. As articulated in *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempted to demonstrate that although we come to an understanding of ourselves and our world through a practical relation, the conditions of this practical relation is not merely ours to choose in an abstract, decisionistic sense. Rather, the modes of revealing come *to* us, are disclosed to us pre-reflectively. The particular space in which we find ourselves, with its particular conditions and limitations, is what Heidegger called a ‘clearing’ or a ‘determinate field’.

114 Unlike Marx, however, Heidegger does not submit this practical relation to what he might understand as a productionist metaphysics, guided by a rationalist teleology.
Throughout his writings Heidegger tried to outline several distinctive features of how it is we come to find ourselves within such a clearing. These distinctive features he referred to, at least in *Being and Time*, as ‘existentials’, two of which include ‘Care’ and ‘Being-in’. In this early work, Heidegger did not specifically name ‘freedom’ as an existential. However, after *Being and Time*, particularly in the middle essays cited at the outset he came to the conclusion that freedom must be included as one of the fundamental conditions of world-disclosure. In fact, it was in these works that Heidegger used the term ‘freedom’ to describe one of the *most important* existential conditions of world-disclosure. Hence claims such as,

> *Die Freiheit ist der Grund des Grundes*. Als dieser Grund aber ist die Freiheit der *Ab-grund* des Daseins. Nicht als sei die einzelne freie Verhaltung grundlos, sondern die Freiheit stellt in ihrem Wesen als Transzendenz das Dasein als Seinkönnen in Möglichkeiten, die vor seiner endlichen Wahl, d.h. in seinem Schicksal, aufklaffen. (*GA* 9, 173-174)

My argument about the need to think freedom **ontologically** takes this opening up to the question of freedom as an existential condition of world-disclosure as its starting point. But what work is being done by the predicate ‘free’ when Heidegger speaks of *das Freie der Lichtung*? The ‘freedom of the clearing’ begins, I argue, from a defense of something like “epistemological indeterminacy.” This is to say that the world of practical involvement cannot be reduced to a determinant ‘perspective’ or ‘system of thought’ knowable once and for all. It is to acknowledge the finitude of our

---

115 “Freedom is ground of ground . . . As this ground, however, freedom is the abyss of ground [Ab-grund] in Dasein. Not that our individual, free comportment is groundless; rather, in its essence as transcendence, freedom places Dasein, as potentiality for being, in possibilities that gape open before its finite choice, i.e., within its destiny.” (*P*, 134)

understandings of the world, not as an obstacle to the freedom of the discrete subject, but as a condition of such freedom. Heidegger gives, I think, two main reasons for this.

I.A. Background Understanding

The first way in which Heidegger wants to base a claim to freedom as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’ is through a claim about the condition or ground of intelligibility and veracity. This involves making a claim about the relationship between our knowledge claims and background understanding. From Being and Time through to his later writings, Heidegger argued that investigation of the meaning of something within a world, a particular lifeworld or horizon of disclosure, is only possible because it is set against a larger backdrop of Understanding [Verstehen]. That which can be consciously reflected upon, thematized and articulated is premised upon a background world which cannot in any general holistic manner be made the object of inquiry itself.

As Stephen Mulhall puts it,

the world itself is not a possible object of knowledge—because it is not an object at all, not an entity or set of entities. It is that within which entities appear, a field or horizon ontologically grounded in a totality of assignment-relations; it is the conditions for any intra-worldly relation, and so it is not analysable in terms of any such relation.\(^{117}\)

Thus, whenever we attempt to think the general conditions for world-disclosure, we actually begin by thinking about particular beings, activities and practices within a world.\(^{118}\) When we do this, we engage in interpretation. Attempting to think about the


\(^{118}\) Charles Taylor puts this point as follows: “We can’t turn the background against which we think into an object for us. The task of reason has to be conceived quite differently: as that of articulating the background, ‘disclosing’ what it involves. This may open the way to detaching ourselves from or altering part of what has constituted it—may, indeed, make such alteration irresistible; but only through our unquestioning reliance on the rest.” in ‘Overcoming Epistemology,’ Philosophical Arguments (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1995), p.12.
meaning of specific features of our lifeworld can lead us to question the general context in which the question arises at all—this is the Seinsfrage, or the question of the meaning of Being. When we move to this level of analysis we can see that both the object and the subject of any particular inquiry are mutually constituted by a larger backgrounded field of meaning which cannot, even in principle, be made fully explicit. As numerous commentators have noted, this makes Heidegger a major figure in the long philosophical project to overcome traditional epistemology.119

After Being and Time, Heidegger shifted his focus away from questions of intelligibility and meaning towards questions of truth and freedom. His insight here amounts to a kind of incompleteness theorem and may be summarized thusly: the intelligibility and veracity of our articulations about the world can never be established by demonstrating a direct correspondence between the articulation and the ‘world-as-such’ since ‘a world’ only appears through an already existing field of intelligibility which includes the basic language of articulation by which the subject comes to the world and itself. Thus, prior to the kind of truth that exists in the correspondence between the subject’s articulated knowledge claims and the objective world is the event of self-manifestation by phenomenon. Correspondence is but verification after this event-truth.

Heidegger attempted to flesh out these claims in a series of essays that preoccupied him through his middle period. The move away from thinking about the ground of meaning and intelligibility (as preoccupied Being and Time) towards the ground of veracity naturally led him to think more about the ‘governance’ of the lifeworld and thus human freedom. Here again, he pointed to the necessity of a

119 See, for instance, Charles Taylor’s use of Heidegger in ‘Overcoming Epistemology,’ ‘Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein,’ ‘To follow a rule,’ in Philosophical Arguments, Ibid.
background field, or lifeworld, against which the relation between propositions and
things makes sense. There is nothing inherently true (or untrue) about a correlation
between a word and a thing: the meaning and truth (or untruth) of the statement must
reside more fundamentally in the relational world which grounds and makes possible
both (the statement, by providing a language of meaning, and the thing by rendering it
intelligible as a thing). He writes,

Dieses erscheinen des Dinges im Durchmessen eines Entgegen vollzieht sich
innerhalb eines Offenen, dessen Offenheit vom Vorstellen nicht erst geschaffen,
sondern je nur als ein Bezugsbereich bezogen und übernommen wird. Die
Beziehung des vorstellenden Aussagens auf das Ding ist der Vollzug jenes
Verhältnisses, das sich ursprünglich und jeweils als ein Verhalten zum Schwingen
bringt. (GA 9, 184)\textsuperscript{120}

Thus, the opening \textit{[Offenen]} and the comportment \textit{[Verhalten]} that permit a thing to
appear as such and a statement to correlate (or not) to this thing (what Heidegger calls the
‘traversing of the oppositional’ \textit{[Durchmessen eines Entgegen]})) is determined first by the
‘relational field’ \textit{[Bezugsbereich]} in which Dasein always already finds itself. Since this
relational field (and its related opening and comportment) is \textit{prior} and \textit{foundational} to
any truth as correspondence, \textit{it} is in fact the ground of truth. This, which Heidegger
names \textit{ontological truth} \textit{(GA 9, 131)}, stands prior to what might be called ‘propositional
truth’: the correspondence of a proposition with a referent thing. In this sense then, even
‘propositional untruth’ is reliant upon ‘ontological truth’. Even a lie or a mistake still
presumes the process by which the thing in question came to be rendered intelligible, to
be an object for thought. The upshot of this claim is that both (a) meaning and (b) truth
presuppose a ‘world’ which cannot be reduced to a determinate set of transcendental

\textsuperscript{120} “This appearing of the thing in traversing a field of opposedness takes place within an open region, the
openness of which is not first created by the presenting but rather is only entered into and taken over as a
domain of relatedness. The relation of the presentative statement to the thing is the accomplishment of that
\textit{bearing} that originally and always comes to prevail as a comportment.” \textit{(P, 141)}

conditions. Rather, our understandings of the world and self stand in an *immanent* relationship to the forms of practical involvement that disclose the world to us in the first place. ‘The world’ as the totality of this involvement will thus always ‘evade’ our attempts to formalize it as interpreted or thematized knowledge claims. Hence, Heidegger’s first use of the term ‘freedom’ to name this evasion, this indeterminacy.

**I.B. Spielraum**

The second aspect of freedom and epistemological indeterminacy is the irreducible ‘play-space’ [*Spielraum*] that characterizes any particular actual clearing. To understand how this feature of ontological freedom is distinct from the first two, it is important to point out that background understanding and projection are best understood as features of world-disclosure, while ‘play-space’ is a feature of any particular clearing. In order to highlight the difference between world-disclosure and a particular clearing, we might note that the latter is a specific, localized and historical ‘world’, ‘realm of intelligibility’, or ‘horizon of disclosure’. World-disclosure, by contrast, is that which makes this horizon possible. The clearing is the present while world-disclosure is ‘that which presences’ [*das Anwesende*]. World-disclosure, then, refers also to those basic modes of practical involvement which remain backgrounded to us, which lie beyond our purview.

A clearing is revealed through the event of disclosive truth given by the sets of pre-reflexive activities by which Dasein discloses its world. Dasein is thus always already within some clearing in this process of revealing. However, no particular clearing is boundless, absolute knowledge. Not everything can be a meaningful way to
think and act in any particular moment; not everything can appear as a possible truth; far from it. The clearing, while disclosing some features of our world, will necessarily close off others. This closure is the finitude of the present, the finitude of Dasein’s world.

Heidegger writes:

der Entwurf der Seinsverfassung vom Seienden, durch den zugleich ein bestimmtes Feld abgesteckt wird (Natur, Geschichte) als Gebiet möglicher Vergegenständlichung durch wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis. (GA 9, 132; emphasis added).121

The simultaneous (note that Heidegger specifically states these characteristics to occur ‘zugleich’) and equiprimordial constitution of pre-ontological understanding (the field of knowledge and action) in projection and determinate limitation is key to developing an understanding of agency as situated. Heidegger is pointing out that the event of truth which renders the lifeworld intelligible always already occurs within a ‘determinate field’ [bestimmtes Feld] that ‘marks out’ [abstecken], ‘solidifies’ [verfestigen] and ‘circumscribes’ [umgrenzen]122 the ‘fundamental concepts’ [Grundbegriffe] of the ‘relevant study’ [betreffenden Wissenschaft]. Elsewhere, he writes that the event of disclosure is also simultaneously a ‘binding’ [Bindung] and ‘obligation’ [Verbindlichkeit].123 In other words, no concept or line of inquiry can come before us

121 “projection of the ontological constitution of beings that simultaneously marks out a determinate field (nature, history) as the region for possible objectification through scientific knowledge.” (P, 104) Note here that ‘scientific knowledge’ is a translation of ‘wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis’ and should be taken in the broadest sense of both terms ‘scientific’ and ‘knowledge’. That is to say, Heidegger is not talking about ‘science’ in the narrow sense as it is used in modern English (i.e., natural and mathematical sciences, as opposed to the humanities), but in the sense of general reflexive thematized knowledge.

122 In the William McNeil translation of ‘On the Essence of Ground’ found in Pathmarks (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), the terms are translated as such: abstecken = ‘marks out’, verfestigen = ‘anchors’, and umgrenzen = ‘governs’. I don’t see the need for these less literal translations.

123 Although ‘binding’ and ‘obligation’ are good translations for these terms, in this context we might also point to the notions of ‘connection’ and ‘commitment’. This might convey better the sense that, in setting out a range or field of possibility, the ‘worlding’ of the ‘world’ is not a system of governance in the sense of a dictate from someone (or something) to Dasein. Rather, in rendering the world intelligible to Dasein, this process also lays out a series of connections between things, as well as a general commitment which
that is not already within a determinate field of knowledge circumscribed by the form of life or factual conditions of our present ontological condition.\(^{124}\)

However, *within* this circumscribed realm of intelligibility, there is always some ‘play-room’ [*Spielraum*]. The event of disclosure reveals a *range* of possible meaningful modes of being for Dasein (ways of thinking, acting, living). Since it sets out the *range*, the event is characterized by closure and finitude. However, this does not mean that the event determines what *particular* modes of being will be actualized by Dasein in any specific historical moment. Dasein always has some ‘play-room’ *within* the lifeworld to pick up this or that meaningful choice and actualize it. Heidegger writes,

> Jede Ausweisung muß sich in einem Umkreis von *Möglichem* bewegen... Diese gibt ihrem Wesen nach notwendig immer *Ausschlagbereiche* von Möglichem vor... Der Widerschein *dieses* Ursprungs des Wesens von Grund um Gründen der endlichen Freiheit zeigt sich im ‘potius quam’ der Formeln des Satzes vom Grunde. (GA 9, 173)\(^{125}\)

To clarify the issue through a crude example, we might think of the lifeworld as offering up ten possible routes of action and thought, only one of which will be actually taken up. Since the lifeworld has presented only ten routes, determines that these ten are potential routes, and even differentially distributes them as *meaningful* options (that is, governs that not all ten will appear as equally possible or meaningful) it clearly governs the range of possibilities and ‘binds’ our choices to some degree. However, *within* this range, we have a measure of agency in choosing which route to take up. The route which is

---

\(^{124}\) The link between projection’s function in marking out a ‘determinate field’ [*bestimmtes Feld*] and the general condition of facticity as an existential of Dasein can be seen by pointing to Heidegger’s earlier characterization of Dasein’s as defined by its ‘determinate being’ [*Seinsbestimmtheit*] in the section on facticity in *Being and Time* (BT §12).

\(^{125}\) “Every accounting for things must move within a *sphere of what is possible*... In accordance with its essence, such grounding always necessarily provides a *given range of what is possible*... The reflection of *this* origin of the essence of ground in the grounding that pertains to finite freedom shows itself in the ‘potius quam’ found in these formulations of the principle of reason.” (P, 133)
actualized is a subset of the total possible options. The gap between the one actual and
the total possible is what Heidegger calls ‘play-room’. We can see, therefore, that
whatever actualized modes of being Dasein enacts will only be a subset within the range
of total possible field, even while acknowledging that the range is not exhaustive of all
possibilities (and is thus finite). In this sense, the lifeworld can always be said to have
some measure of freedom built into its constitution. This is the final aspect of freedom as
‘epistemological indeterminacy’.

In stepping back to summarize and assess this first sense of freedom, we might note
that Heidegger has employed a theoretical move in relation to finitude parallel to that of
Kant. Just as Kant sought to redefine the finite limits of human knowledge positively,
making them the transcendental conditions of knowledge per se, the condition of rational
determination and thus the condition of freedom, so too does Heidegger seek to redefine
finitude positively. For Heidegger, the finite nature of our understanding—what I have
called here ‘epistemological indeterminacy’—does not threaten the conditions of freedom
but rather guarantees them. The notion that freedom makes the space between
determinate limitations and possibilities is a key insight of Heidegger’s. It has, moreover,
been highly influential on other theorists of freedom in the continental tradition,
particularly Merleau-Ponty and Foucault. As Merleau-Ponty put it in The
Phenomenology of Perception,

Unless there are cycles of behaviour, open situations requiring a certain completion
and capable of constituting a background to either a confirmatory or transformatory
decision, we never experience freedom. Choice of an intelligible sort is excluded,
not only because there is no time anterior to time, but because choice presupposes a
prior commitment and because the idea of an initial choice involves a contradiction.
If freedom is to have room in which to move, if it is to be desirable as freedom,
there must be something to hold it away from its objectives; it must have a field, which means that there must be for it special possibilities or realities which tend to cling to being... Our freedom is not to be sought in a spurious discussion on the conflict between a style of life which we have no wish to reappraise and circumstances suggestive of another: the real choice is that between our whole character and our manner of being in the world. 126

What Merleau-Ponty (and, as we will see in the second half of the dissertation, Foucault) gestures to here is that freedom defined in terms of a ‘field’ is primary to freedom as self-mastery, or autonomous choosing. Every act of choice is only comprehensible, indeed is only possible, because it enters into a sphere of what is possible. 127 Since the field and its relative openness is primary to the choosing subject, Heidegger famously concludes that

Freiheit is nicht die Ungebundenheit des Tun- und Nichttunkönnens. Freiheit ist aber auch nicht erst die Bereitschaft für ein Gefordertes und Notwendiges (und so irgendwie Seiendes). Die Frieeheit ist alldem (der ‘negativen’ und ‘positiven’ Freiheit) zuvor die Eingelassenheit in die Entbergung des Seienden al seines solchen. (GA 9, 189)128

This field must be a determinant field, in the sense of providing finite, limited, concrete possibilities which are not all equally available. Moreover, actualization of choice within this field alters the range of possibilities. The field of possibilities is thus disclosed to the agent, but also through them and their activities. The world is thus engaged in not as a determinant ‘thing’ over against the subject, but rather as a cluster of probabilities and

127 In his critique of Isaiah Berlin’s concept of negative liberty, Charles Taylor drew similar conclusions. He wrote, “[T]he recourse to signification takes us beyond a Hobbesian scheme. Freedom is no longer just the absence of external obstacle tout court, but the absence of external obstacle to significant action, to what is important to man... Thus the application even of our negative notion of freedom requires a background condition of what is significant, according to which some restrictions are seen to be without relevance for freedom altogether, and others are judged as being of greater and lesser importance.” In ‘What’s wrong with negative liberty?’, p.218-219 (emphasis added). Of course, Taylor was himself also strongly influenced by Heidegger.
128 “Freedom is not mere absence of constraint with respect to what we can or cannot do. Nor is it on the other hand mere readiness for what is required and necessary (and so somehow a being). Prior to all this (‘negative’ and ‘positive’ freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such.” (P, 145)
possibilities that permit us to think and act in a multiplicity of ways. The ‘epistemological indeterminancy’ that is entailed by engaging in a world-as-field-of-potentiality is, for Heidegger, the guarantee of the openness of the world and it is something we should be thankful for rather than lament.

II. Openness

Now, even if one grants Heidegger’s claim that world-disclosure cannot be known through a set of determinant structures, it does not necessarily flow from this that we need accede to the language of ‘freedom’. The most obvious objection that springs to mind might be phrased thus: the inability of human consciousness to grasp the determinant rules or structures of world-disclosure—to make the ground of our activities and inquiries fully self-transparent—does not mean that Being itself is indeterminate (much less free), it only means that we cannot know it totally.

To counter such an objection, Heidegger might point to the separation implicit within this claim between Being as it is rendered intelligible and Being as such. This distinction (between the thing-in-itself and thing-under-description) is at the heart of the whole epistemological tradition and is precisely the distinction he thinks cannot be sustained. It cannot be sustained because, for Heidegger, both are constituted by this larger field or context of meaning. The epistemological approach, one in which a problematic of subject-object arises, fails to see the productive and reciprocal relationship between Dasein (subject), the object of inquiry and the general field of inquiry itself. Epistemological approaches ignore how the inquiry itself—the ‘seeing’ of the thing—is part of the process of constituting something as a thing (the disclosure) and,
as such, they miss how the de-contextual interpretation is never getting at the ‘thing-in-itself’ (a concept that Heidegger is attempting to displace altogether).

Together, the two main features of world-disclosure mentioned above (background understanding and Spielraum) ground the first sense of freedom as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’. This is properly called an ontological feature of freedom because this is not something that Dasein has or doesn’t have. Rather, it is a feature of the disclosure by which things appear to Dasein within an intelligible totality—a feature of that by which a ‘world’ is presented to and through Dasein. Hence Heidegger’s repeated association of ontological truth with ontological freedom: “Das Wesen der Wahrheit enthüllt sich als Freiheit.” (GA 9, 192) 

It should be clear by this point that ontological freedom prefigures human subjectivity and agency. As Heidegger states, it is “Grund der Möglichkeit des Daseins” (GA 31, 134). This reversal of the relationship between selfhood and (ontological) freedom, requires a conceptual reordering in terms of how we think about freedom and agency as such:

müssen wir eine vollkommene Umstellung des Ortes der Freiheit vollziehen, so daß sich jetzt ergibt: Das Freiheitsproblem ist nicht in die Leitfrage und Grundfrage der Philosophie eingebaut, sondern umgekehrt: die Leitfrage der Metaphysik gründet auf der Frage nach dem Wesen der Freiheit.

Wenn aber der Wesensblick diese Richtung nehmen muß, wenn das Grundproblem der Philosophie von dorther überhaupt gesehen werden muß, dann ist es jetzt gleichgültig, ob die kantische Interpretation der Fassung der Freiheit im Rahmen der Kausalität zu Recht besteht. Auch wenn das nicht der Fall sein sollte, dann liegt nach der neuen These der Kausalität, Bewegung, Sein überhaupt, die Freiheit zugrunde. Freiheit ist nichts Besonderes unter anderem, nicht aufgereiht neben anderen, sondern vorgeordnet und durchherrschend gerade das Ganze im Ganzen. Wenn wir aber die Freiheit als Grund der Möglichkeit des Daseins zu suchen haben, dann ist sie selbst in ihrem Wesen ursprünglicher als

129 “The essence of truth reveals itself as freedom.” (P, 147)
130 “the ground of the possibility of Dasein” (EHF, 94)
In the passage above, Heidegger is still speaking of freedom in the ontological sense. We are still concerned here with the conditions of world-disclosure, particularly with demonstrating that such conditions are necessarily indeterminate and primary to human activities of knowing and interpreting. We are not yet speaking of a feature of human agency in a direct sense.

To move us from freedom as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’ to a form of human freedom, it might be helpful to again set out a possible objection to the picture given above. A critic might say the following: Your notion of ontological freedom is purely descriptive of the constitution of realms of intelligibility and actualization of meaningful choice. As such, it cannot properly be called ‘freedom’ since there is, by your own admission, no way that Being cannot be free. If this ‘freedom’ merely refers to a feature

---

131 “With respect to the schema, we must effect a complete repositioning of freedom, so that what now emerges is that the problem of freedom is not built into the leading and fundamental problems of philosophy, but, on the contrary, the leading question of metaphysics is grounded in the question concerning the essence of freedom.

But if our essential questioning must take this direction, if the fundamental problem of philosophy must be viewed from this perspective, then it is irrelevant whether Kant was correct to interpret freedom within the framework of causality. Even if he was not correct in this, still, according to the new thesis, causality, movement, and being as such, are grounded in freedom. Freedom is not some particular thing among and alongside other things, but is superordinate and governing in relation to the whole... freedom must itself, in its essence, be more primordial than man. Man is only an administrator of freedom, i.e. he can only let-be the freedom which is accorded to him, in such a way that, through man, the whole contingency of freedom becomes visible.

Human freedom now no longer means freedom as a property of man, but man as a possibility of freedom. Human freedom is the freedom that breaks through in man and takes him up unto itself, thus making man possible.” (EHF, 94)
of the constitution of a field of practical involvement (a clearing) then this field, by
definition, must be free. If this is so, ‘freedom’ loses any specific normative character
(we could just as well say that world-disclosure was determined by this particular form of
indeterminacy), and/or we lose any critical purchase for evaluating different ways of
thinking and acting in relation to the world. In other words, there can be no cause for
concern as world-disclosure must, regardless of us, be free in the ontological sense given
above. This objection is an important one to dissect since it appears, in various guises, in
critiques of Heidegger’s work.

To take on this objection, we might begin by asking: What would happen if we
did not know that world-disclosure was free in the senses given above? Or, more to the
point (as it shifts the question away from knowledge and towards general embodiment or
comportment), what if our form of life was structured such as to deny ontological
freedom? How might we comport ourselves towards the world in this case?

Crudely put, Heidegger wants to argue that there are two basic modes of
comporting ourselves with respect to ontological freedom: one that acknowledges it and
one that doesn’t. The form of comportment that acknowledges the indeterminacy of
Being (ontological freedom) is what he calls ‘letting-be’ [Seinlassen], an ‘open
comportment’ [offenständigen Verhalten] or, at times, ‘releasement’ [Gelassenheit]. The
other mode—that which denies ontological freedom—is that which closes off the
possibilities latent within a field of practical involvement. In ‘The Essence of Truth’
Heidegger writes,

Weil jedoch die Wahrheit im Wesen Freiheit ist, deshalb kann der geschichtliche
Mensch im Seinlassen des Seienden das Seiende auch nicht das Seiende sein
lassen, das es ist und wie es ist. Das Seiende wird dann verdeckt und verstellt.
Der Schein kommt zur Macht. In ihr gelangt das Unwesen der Wahrheit zum
Vorschein. Weil aber die ek-sistente Freiheit als Wesen der Mensch nur als Eigentum dieser Freiheit ek-sistiert und so geschichtsfähig wird, deshalb kann auch das Unwesen der Wahrheit nicht erst nachträglich dem bloßen Unvermögen und der Nachlässigkeit des Menschen entspringen. Die Unwahrheit muß vielmehr aus dem Wesen der Wahrheit kommen. Nur weil Wahrheit und Unwahrheit im Wesen sich nicht gleichgültig sind, sondern zusammengehören, kann überhaupt ein wahrer Satz in die Schärfe des Gegenteils zum entsprechend unwahren Satz treten. (GA 9, 191)\textsuperscript{132}

It is also important to keep in mind that these two modes are both instances of Care [Sorge], not in the moral and intentionalist sense carried with the English term, but in the sense of a general mode of comportment, embedded with relations that matter, embodied in a form of life. Thus, neither are they something we ‘think’ or ‘do’—they are forms of life we are (hence Heidegger’s claim above that “ek-sistent freedom… is not a property of human beings…on the contrary humans ek-sist and so become capable of history only as the property of this freedom”).

Now, on first blush, the mode of comportment that acknowledges finitude and indeterminacy as the ground of freedom seems defined negatively and appears to be rather passive. Neither ‘letting-be’ nor ‘releasement’ appear to be things we can enact. They are defined rather by what we don’t do—i.e., don’t control, don’t order, don’t enframe, etc. This is another common misconception of Heidegger’s work: that it leads us to a passive quietism, a mere non-ordering that is the positive offshoot of us standing in awe of Being as such. This appears to critics as anti-humanist (which it may be, if we take a rather specific sense of the term), conservative or even reactionary. And,

\textsuperscript{132} “However, because truth is in essence freedom, historical human beings can, in letting beings be, also not let beings be the beings that they are and as they are. Then beings are covered up and distorted. Semblance comes to power. In it the nonessence of truth comes to the fore. However, because ek-sistent freedom as the essence of truth is not a property of human beings; because on the contrary humans ek-sist and so become capable of history only as the property of this freedom; the nonessence of truth cannot first arise subsequently from mere human incapacity and negligence. Rather, untruth must derive from the essence of truth. Only because truth and untruth are, in essence, not irrelevant to one another, but rather belong together, is it possible for a true proposition to enter into pointed opposition to the corresponding untrue proposition.” (P, 146).
undoubtedly, there are points in Heidegger’s career when he seemed to be saying such things. What I want to claim is that he didn’t only say such things and, to the extent that he did, it was not necessary. Rather than think of ‘letting-be’ as primarily a passive mode of comportment, Heidegger repeatedly insisted that “to let-be is to engage oneself [Scheinlassen] with beings”. He even claims that this mode of comportment will be ‘exposing’, ‘suspending’ or ‘off-putting’ [aus-setzend] for us:

But more detail is needed here for these statements to stand out in their specific meaning. How precisely can ‘letting-be’ also be an ‘engagement’ with Being? In order to see how ‘letting-be’ can be an engagement we have to understand better the alternative. What is the mode of comportment that does not acknowledge ontological freedom, that does not ‘let beings be’?

133 “However, the phrase required not—to let beings be—does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to engage oneself with beings. On the other hand, to be sure, this is not to be understood only as the mere management, preservation, tending, and planning of the beings in each case encountered or sought out. To let be—that is, to let beings be as the beings that they are—means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself… To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather, such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are, and in order that presentative correspondence might take its standard from them. As this letting-be it exposes itself to beings as such and transposes all comportment into the open region. Letting-be, i.e., freedom, is intrinsically exposing, ek-sistent.” (P, 144)
In Heidegger’s terminology, an engagement that is freeing is one that loosens one’s relation to oneself such that our involvement within a world with its own, preexisting ethical significance and latent potentiality is revealed to us. This engagement will be a mode of comportment that embodies a respect for its own contingency and, in this limited sense, will be more basic or primordial than one that doesn’t. As Richard Rorty states in his reading of Heidegger, “an understanding of Being is more primordial than another if it makes it easier to grasp its own contingency.”134 William Connolly also confirms this reading, praising those “the element[s] of connectedness, receptivity, interdependence, and belonging” which can be derived from this sense of freedom as indeterminacy, contingency and finitude. Connolly argues we learn from Heidegger that,

One stands in a more free relation to one’s own ideals when one affirms that the world might never be exhausted by a single perspective or a constellation of contending perspectives. The world is always richer than the systems of thought through which we comprehend and organize it.135

I would simply rephrase this formulation slightly to argue that it is not merely one’s “ideals” that we stand in a more free relation to, but rather more basically and more fundamentally our selves and our world.

But what does this mean in practice? It means at least that a ‘free relation’ to the world—to the field of practical involvement in which we find ourselves— involves some form of activity (an engagement) that works ‘on’ or ‘against’ the particular metaphysical entrapments of the present. This means in practice being attuned to the contingency and indeterminacy of world-disclosure which, in turn, means accepting that ‘we’ (our

---

selfhood) are beholden to this contingency—that we are contingent beings who are ‘held’ by ontological freedom:

Wenn aber das ek-sistente Da-sein als das Seinlassen von Seiendem den Menschen zu seiner ‘Freiheit’ defreit, indem sie ihm überhaupt erst Möglichkeit (Seiendes) zur Wahl stellt und Notwendiges (Seiendes) ihm aufträgt, dann verfügt nicht das menschliche Belieben über die Freiheit. Der Mensch ‘besitzt’ die Freiheit nicht als Eigenschaft, sondern höchstens gilt das Umgekehrte: die Freiheit, das ek-sistente, entbergende Da-sein besitzt den Menschen… (GA 9, 190)\textsuperscript{136}

While this formulation does not appear on first read to relate directly to the freedom normally thought of as a feature of human life (and has even been misconstrued as the antithesis to human freedom), Heidegger clearly does not support such a reading. Rather, here (as throughout much of his middle writings) he is attempting to demonstrate the internal relation between the potentiality latent within worldly activities themselves (the freedom of Being) and the freedom of particular human beings in their particular worlds. In other words, Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that we are free only because we belong to a world that discloses a range of possibilities that are accessible to us. Thus, while the existence of such worldly possibilities is a condition of freedom, so too is our openness to them. “The openness of the world shows itself in our respective openness.”\textsuperscript{137} There is a mutual interrelatedness to our ethical (self)positioning and the possibilities for transformation within the worldly activities that comprise our world of practical involvement. This openness to the possibilities of the world requires a constant attentiveness to our immanence, a positioning of oneself that cultivates sensitivity and

\textsuperscript{136} “But if ek-sistente Da-sein, which lets beings be, sets the human being free for his ‘freedom’ by first offering to his choice something possible (a being) and by imposing on him something necessary (a being), human caprice does not then have freedom at its disposal. The human being does not ‘possess’ freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom, ek-sistente, disclosive Da-sein, possesses the human being…” (P, 145)

\textsuperscript{137} Figal, p.18.
receptivity to what is offered. This openness is what Heideggers calls ‘disclosedness’ [Erschlossenheit]. Heidegger himself makes this move from contingency and indeterminacy in world-disclosure to situated human freedom more explicit in ‘On the Essence of Truth’. He writes,

Von hier aus zeigt sich aber auch: die Freiheit ist nur deshalb der Grund der inneren Möglichkeit der Richtigkeit, weil sie ihr eigenes Wesen aus dem ursprünglicheren Wesen der einzig wesentlichen Wahrheit empfängt. Die Freiheit wurde zunächst als Freiheit für das Offenbare eines Offenen bestimmt. Wie ist dieses Wesen der Freiheit zu denken? Das Offenbare, dem sich ein vorstellendes Aussagen als richtiges angleicht, ist das jeweils in einem offenständigen Verhalten offene Seiende. Die frieheit zum Offenbaren eines Offenen läßt das jewilige Seiende das Seiende sein, das es ist. Freiheit enthüllt sich jetzt als das Seinlassen von Seiendem. (GA 9, 187-188)\textsuperscript{138}

One way of fleshing out in more detail what this open-comportment might mean is through examining its antonym.

\section*{III. Metaphysics and (Self)Concealment}

Since Heidegger’s ontological thesis regarding freedom begins from a positive redescription of our finitude, he argues that, quite paradoxically, modes of practical involvement in the world which take as their point of departure the possibility of absolute knowledge and full self-transparency are actually more occluded to themselves and serve to conceal the conditions under which freedom is realized. Heidegger can formulate ‘letting-be’ as an ‘engagement’ with the world because he sees this engagement as one that works against this tendency to (self)concealment.

\textsuperscript{138} “But here it becomes evident also that freedom is the ground of the inner possibility of correctness only because it receives its own essence from the more originary essence of uniquely essential truth. Freedom was initially determined as freedom for what is opened up in an open region. How is this essence of freedom to be thought? That which is opened up, that to which a presentative statement as correct corresponds, are beings opened up in an open comportment. Freedom for what is opened up in an open region lets beings be the beings they are. Freedom now reveals itself as letting beings be.” (P, 144)
Throughout his career, Heidegger attempted to articulate the various ways in which a mode of revealing might come to conceal its own practical involvement in a world, to conceal the fact that rather than merely ‘reflect’ reality, modes of revealing are engagements with reality on a practical level, thus implicating the acquisition of knowledge about the world with an ethical relationship in the world. That this concealing/revealing is a central preoccupation of Heidegger’s entire oeuvre can hardly be doubted. What did change, however, was his analysis of the various ways this concealing/revealing was manifest, as well as his account of how and why it occurred.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Being and Time presented the problem of (self)concealment in ontological terms. In other words, Dasein has a tendency to conceal its own practical involvement in a world (and thus, of the potentiality for transformation within such a world) because this concealing tendency is part of its very being. Dasein is, amongst other things, characterized as a being that tends to flee from its own finite worldliness. In Division II of Being and Time, Heidegger argued that the horizon of death permitted the grasping of one’s own finitude, thus providing an opportunity for Dasein to recall its worldliness, not to evade its condition, and thus (if only momentarily or inconsistently) to comport itself authentically. Inauthenticity, fallenness and entanglement—the antonyms of a ‘free’ and authentic mode of being-in-the-world—were analyzed only at this level of ontology and, thus, were presented without reference to social or historical variation in their manifestation. Put succinctly, if Dasein tends towards self-concealment as a feature of its very being, and by extension, as a feature of world-disclosure as such, then the analysis of this concealing need not take into account the differential social, cultural and historical contexts in which Dasein finds itself.
For much of his career Heidegger did not see himself as working against any particular, historical case of inauthenticity, fallenness or entanglement, but rather against the general tendency in Western thought towards thinking of knowledge as primarily a function of detached contemplation— as mediated by consciousness— rather than derivative of modes of practical involvement. Thus, his original project was described as a ‘phenomenological destruction’ of epistemology and metaphysics themselves (or, even more grandly, of ‘the history of Being in the West’). In *Being and Time*, in showing that consciously reflected upon articulations of reality (Interpretation) presuppose a background which is not itself verifiable, Heidegger had attempted to demonstrate that Understanding is grounded only in a historically situated *form of life*.\(^{139}\) This means that the whole manner of questioning in which metaphysics attempts to grasp the structure of reality *independent* of a temporally situated form of life is (a) mistaken and, (b) *itself* a *form of life that entangles our mode of comportment in the present*.

Metaphysics is, for Heidegger, the paradigmatic case of our self-concealment, arising out of *Seinsvergessenheit*. As the latter term connotes, in a metaphysics of the present, we ‘forget Being’. But stated at this level of abstraction, the two words ‘forget Being’ don’t mean much.\(^{140}\) That’s why I’ve tried to show that, for Heidegger ‘world-disclosure’ is characterized by an certain ‘freedom’ with respect to our forms of

---

\(^{139}\) In this sense at least, the ‘forms of life’ or ‘worlds’ serve the same function as the transcendental subject in Kant. Just as the transcendental subject ordered and formed both the intuitions of things in space and time and inner intuitions of the empirical self for Kant, so too does understanding form the world, within which we find things, others, and ourselves for Heidegger.

\(^{140}\) Rorty helpfully phrases it thusly: “But *what* is forgotten when we forget the ‘openedness of beings’? Heidegger’s familiar and unhelpful answer is ‘Being’. A slightly more complex and helpful answer is: that it was Dasein using language which let beings be in the first place.” Rorty, ‘Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism,’ in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp.27-49, 45. The fact that it was ‘Dasein using language which let beings be in the first place’ relates back to my response to the first imagined objection to potentiality as a feature of ontological freedom, which, I argued, relied implicitly upon a distinction between the thing-in-itself and the thing-under-description.
knowledge—an epistemological indeterminacy. What metaphysics causes us to ‘forget’
is this indeterminacy, which in turn is partially derived from the fact that it is our capacity
for aspectival modification that makes world-disclosure indeterminate and transformable
in the first place. We are entrapped in our own forgetfulness of ontological freedom
insofar as the presupposition that Being is a ‘thing’ which can be known independent of
our descriptions and articulations of it serves to orientate our actions, telling us what
counts as ‘true’ or ‘false’ ways of relating to the world.

Of course, merely naming the problem of metaphysics is not to overcome it. In
fact, Heidegger is ambiguous about whether ‘metaphysics’ is something that can, even in
principle, be ‘overcome’. He writes

> Die Rede vom Ende der Metaphysik will nicht sagen, künftig ‘lebten’ keine
> Menschen mehr, die metaphysisch denken und ‘Systeme der Metaphysik’
anfertigen. Noch weniger will damit gesagt sein, das Menschentum ‘lebe’ künftig
> nicht mehr auf dem Grunde der Metaphysik… Was meint aber dann ‘Ende der
> Metaphysik’? Antwort: den geschichtlichen Augenblick, in dem die
> Wesensmöglichkeiten der Metaphysik erschöpft sind. Die letzte dieser
> Möglichkeiten muß diejenige Form der Metaphysik sein, in der ihr Wesen
> umgekehrt wird. (GA 6.2, 178-179)\(^1\)

What Heidegger suggests here is that the very ‘nearness’ of the metaphysical picture is
what blinds us to its working. While Julian Young’s language of ‘absolutization’ is
perhaps somewhat misleading\(^2\), his formulation of the problematic is nevertheless
insightful:

> What [metaphysics] misses is not the being of beings, not being, but rather the
> fact that there are just these universal traits which have categorial status for us is

---

\(^1\) “Our talk of the end of metaphysics does not mean to suggest that in the future men will no longer ‘live’
who think metaphysically and undertake ‘systems of metaphysics.’ Even less do we intend to say that in
the future mankind will no longer ‘live’ on the basis of metaphysics… It means the historical moment in
which the essential possibilities of metaphysics are exhausted. The last of these possibilities must be that
form of metaphysics in which its essence is reversed.” (N4, 148)

\(^2\) The language of ‘absolutization’ may be misleading in naming the phenomenon at issue here because it
risks presenting the problem of metaphysics as something that humans do or don’t do, rather than a
condition, situation or relationship to the world in which we find ourselves.
dependent on the selection made from the smorgasbord of attributes possessed by reality itself which is made by the linguistic practices, the forms of life, in which we live, and move, and have our being. And missing that, missing, not our horizon of disclosure but rather its horizontal character—the perspectival character of our basic perspective on things—it elevates its account of the being of beings into the (one and only) categorial account of reality itself... Through misunderstanding what it has discovered in discovering the being of beings, it elevates (what is in fact) a particular disclosure to tyrannical status, a status which allows the possibility of no other reality-revealing horizon. I shall refer to this phenomenon as ‘absolutization’. As Heidegger uses the term, the error that is metaphysics may be defined as the absolutization of some (of any) horizon of disclosure.143

Such metaphysical interpretations, as Heidegger puts it, put us into an unfree relation to the world and to ourselves not because they are ‘wrong’, but rather because they are totalizing. As he put it in ‘The Question Concerning Technology,’ “Wo dieses herrscht, vertreibt es jede andere Möglichkeit der Entbergung… [E]s verbirgt das Entbergen als soches” (GA 7, 28)144 Hence the tragic irony Heidegger attempted to warn against in his late writings: the more we pursue our ‘freedom’ in the name of mastery over the world—the more we conceal that it is indeed the world, the field of practical involvement, that discloses us—the less free we stand in relation to this field and through it to ourselves. Hence late Heidegger’s identification of the technological pursuit of mastery over the world with a certain pathology of Western modernity. This mode of revealing that had come to prevail in Western modernity was, for Heidegger, problematic not only for specific, historical reasons (what he might refer to as ‘ontic’ problems) but also because it is particularly hard to grasp as a problem. In other words, this is the mode of revealing that conceals itself as a mode of revealing, thus, as Leslie Paul Thiele puts it,

---

144 “Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing... [It] conceals disclosure itself.” (BW, 332-333)
“betray[ing] a resentful unwillingness to acknowledge and affirm the limitations and contingencies that constitute Being-in-the-world.”

For Heidegger, traditional philosophy is of little use in working through this condition. Philosophy, in the traditional sense, must be contrasted therefore, with a more basic ‘thinking’ (GA 9, 317; P, 242). This distinction requires, of course, that Heidegger employs a rather restricted (some might say polemical) use of the term ‘philosophy’, something he increasingly resorted to, beginning with the ‘Letter on Humanism’. Philosophy here refers to the history of Western thought that places primacy on metaphysics: “Die Philosophie folgt auch dort, wo sie wie bei Descartes und Kant ‘kritisch’ wird, stets dem Zug des metaphysischen Vorstellens.” (GA 9, 331)

Heidegger calls philosophy “einer Technik des Erklärens aus obersten Ursachen,” (GA 9, 317) saying that it leads to the twin problems of “der Herrschaft der Subjektivität” (GA 9, 317) (the tendency to see objective reality as reducible to personal ‘values’) and the “unbedingte Vergegenständlichung von allem.” (GA 9, 317)

The tight relationship between Western philosophy and metaphysics is, according to Heidegger, the root of the current problematic of ‘humanism’. Thus, we have now a

---

146 “Philosophy, even when it becomes ‘critical’ through Descartes and Kant, always follows the course of metaphysical representation.” (P, 252)
147 “a technique for explaining from highest causes” (P, 242)
148 “the dominance of subjectivity” (P, 242)
149 The problem with the language of ‘values’, Heidegger states, is that they are both ‘subjectivist’ and, paradoxically, objectifying of non-human reality: “durch die Einschätzung von etwas als Wert wird das Gewertete nur als Gegenstand für die Schätzung des Menschen zugelassen.” (GA 9, 349): “by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for human estimation.” (P, 265)
150 “unconditional objectification of everything” (P, 242). To this end, Heidegger concludes the Letter by saying “Es ist an der Zeit, daß man sich dessen entwöhnt, die Philosophie zu überschätzen und sie deshalb zu überfordern. Nötig ist in der jetzigen Weltnot: weniger Philosophie, aber mehr Achtsamkeit des Denkens; weniger Literatur, aber mehr Pflege des Buchstabens.” (GA 9, 364): “It is time to break the habit of overestimating philosophy and of thereby asking too much of it. What is needed in the present world crisis is less philosophy, but more attentiveness in thinking; less literature, but more cultivation of the letter.” (P, 276)
three-part intersection of terms or concepts consisting of philosophy, metaphysics and humanism. As we have already seen in numerous other writings, and again restated here, Heidegger thinks that metaphysics is the attempt made within western philosophy to understanding Being (world-disclosure) through beings (the specific ‘things’ that we encounter in the present). He states his case thus:


Humanism, Heidegger argues, is a form of metaphysics: “Jeder Humanismus gründet entweder in einer Metaphysik oder er macht sich selbst zum Grund einer solchen.” (GA 9, 321) It examines humanity in search of some universal and permanent essence that can be known independent of the particular historical and practical worlds in which humans always find themselves. This claim would seem to be refuted by the turn taken in Kant whereby the ‘essence’ of the human is defined as freedom, not substance. However, as Heidegger is quick to point out, post-Kantian humanism posits a rationality, an animal rationale (GA 9, 322; P, 245), that ultimately determines the telos of human development much as had earlier substantive theories of human nature. This preoccupation with rational determination is the root of modern Western humanity’s self-

---

151 A theme which will reappear in many later thinker’s work, Foucault included.
152 “Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their being, and so it also thinks the being of beings. But it does not think being as such, does not think the difference between being and beings… Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of being itself. Nor does it therefore ask in what way the essence of the human being belongs to the truth of being. Metaphysics has not only failed up to now to ask this question, the question is inaccessible to metaphysics as such.” (P, 246)
153 “Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one.” (P, 245)
understanding and, since it names our capacity for reflection upon the world, to freedom.

Humanism, and its metaphysics of *logos*, is the key, we are told, to unlocking freedom:

> Versteht man aber unter Humanismus allgemein die Bemühung darum, daß der Mensch frei werde für seine Menschlichkeit und darin seine Würde finde, dann ist je nach der Auffassung der ‘Freiheit’ und der ‘Natur’ des Menschen der Humanismus verschieden. (*GA* 9, 321)\(^{154}\)

In opposing the conflation of rationalism and freedom which Heidegger identifies in humanism, he is careful, however, not to be read as opposing *all* humanism or, even more strongly stated, as being against the *human*. The particular metaphysical form of humanism inherited from the Enlightenment does not, Heidegger reminds us, hold the monopoly on thinking about humanity itself. It is on this basis that Heidegger interprets his earlier work, particularly *Being and Time*, as being against the metaphysics of humanism, but not advocating an *anti-*human philosophy. Quite the contrary:

> daß die höchsten humanistischen Destimmungen des Wesens des Menschen die eigentliche Würde des Menschen noch nicht erfahren. Insofern ist das Denken in *Sein und Zeit* gegen den Humanismus. Aber dieser Gegensatz bedeutet nicht, daß sich solches Denken auf die Gegenseite des Humanen schläge und das Inhumane befürworte, die Unmenschlichkeit verteidige und die Würde des Menschen herabsetze. Gegen den Humanismus wird gedacht, weil er die Humanitas des Menschen nicht hoch genug ansetzt. Freilich beruht die Wesenshoheit des Menschen nicht darin, daß er die Substanz des Seienden als dessen ‘Subjekt’ ist, um als der Machthaber des Seiens das Seiendsein des Seienden in der allzu laut gerühmten ‘Objektivität’ zergehen zu lassen. (*GA* 9, 330)\(^{155}\) … Daß der Gegensatz sum ‘Humanismus’ keineswegs die Verteidigung des Inhumanen einschließt, sondern andere Ausblicke öffnet, dürfte in einigem deutlicher geworden sein. (*GA* 9, 348)\(^{156}\)

---

\(^{154}\) “But if one understands humanism in general as a concern that the human being become free for his humanity and find his worth in it, then humanism differs according to one’s conception of the ‘freedom’ and ‘nature’ of the human being.” (*P*, 245)

\(^{155}\) “To that extent the thinking in *Being and Time* is against humanism. But this opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of the human being. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough. Of course the essential worth of the human being does not consist in his being the substance of beings, as the ‘Subject’ among them, so that as the tyrant of being he may deign to release the beingness of beings into an all too loudly glorified ‘objectivity’.” (*P*, 251-2)

\(^{156}\) “It ought to be somewhat clearer now that opposition to ‘humanism’ in no way implies a defense of the inhuman but rather opens other vistas.” (*P*, 264-5)
We can, then, draw four key features from Heidegger’s critique of metaphysical humanism here. First, he wants to disassociate the particular form of metaphysical humanism (presumably descending from Kant) from having a monopoly over thinking about humanity. Placing oneself against this metaphysical humanism is not, for instance, to be advocating the inhumane. Second, metaphysical humanism must be normatively evaluated in terms of its role in placing humanity as the ‘tyrant of being’. Since metaphysical humanism places our utmost humanity in the reconstruction of a disengaged ‘Subject’ who stands over against the ‘object’ of the world, it claims we are most ourselves when we are least embedded within our worlds. Heidegger wants to argue that this makes us into tyrants, driven by a desire to confirm our autonomous subjectivity by objectifying the world and marshalling it according to our will. Against this ‘tyrant of being’, Heidegger juxtaposes the ‘shepherd of being’.157 A shepherd of being is one who is lives with, guides and cultivates, but is ultimately reliant upon and is respectful to, being. Third, we can see here that Heidegger’s ultimate goal in criticizing metaphysical humanism is to ‘open new vistas’ [andere Ausblicke öffnet]. Thus, while his task here is critical, it is ultimately aimed at making space for new, alternative possibilities, ones foreclosed by the totalizing nature of metaphysical humanism. Finally, what all this suggests is that to take up a problem like ‘metaphysics’ is really to work against specific instances of entrapment—of the tendency to grasp problems related to the structure of reality as though disassociated from the form of life and modes of practical involvement which provides the conditions of possibility for their intelligibility and veracity. The goal here is not to find some single ‘solution’, to overstep metaphysics in a

157 “Der Mensh ist nicht der Herr des Seienden. Der Mensh ist der Hirt des Seins.” (GA 9, 342): “The human being is not the lord of being. The human being is the shepherd of being.” (P, 260)
grand gesture. This would be to take up our world only as a ‘problem’ which needed to be solved. More modestly and carefully, we might say that metaphysics does not represent a problem we can solve, but a particular relationship, or a way of taking up problems. The manner in which we engage in our practical, particular problems is an outgrowth of the understanding of Being in the west called metaphysics, to be sure. But just as certain is that this understanding is sustained and thus transformed by slight modifications in the manner of our practical activities as much as it is ‘overcome’ through grasping it conceptually. The upshot, for Heidegger, is that we must celebrate, rather than lament, the ever-present task of discovering and acknowledging our place within bounds which may, as Leslie Paul Thiele suggests, offer us a certain “dignity” insofar as it “celebrates caretaking rather than mastery.”\footnote{Thiele, p.72.}

IV. From ‘Fundamental’ to ‘Historical’ Ontology

Up to this point, we have focused attention on what Heidegger would call ‘fundamental’ ontology. However, as is hopefully apparent by now, in the turn to questions of human freedom that Heidegger made after \textit{Being and Time}, he explicitly attempted to connect this earlier ontological thesis to questions of historical context. It is one thing to state that Dasein is the kind of being who conceals its own involvement in a world (an ontological thesis). It is another thing to move beyond this and demonstrate how and why this concealing occurs in its particular historical manifestations (an historical inquiry). Furthermore, this second order inquiry is demanded by and internally related to the first insofar as the ontological thesis includes the notion that Dasein is conditioned as well by its \textit{historicity}. Since Dasein only comes to an awareness of itself
and its world through modes of practical involvement which precede it, and these modes are historical constituted, Dasein is in its very ontology a historical being. Hence, the challenged posed by Heidegger’s own early work: outline the very historicality of Dasein’s (ontological) self-concealment and the corresponding forms of engagement that not only reveal the truth of our involvement but also, in so doing, are liberating. Thus, even for those who find Heidegger’s ontological analysis of freedom compelling, the need for a corresponding historical form of critical analysis becomes increasingly apparent. Fundamental ontology, on Heidegger’s own account, retains features of the very metaphysics it seeks to displace insofar as it is grounded in implicit or explicit transcendental claims.\(^{159}\) Resoluteness, we were told, entails “\textit{das erschließende Entwerfen und Bestimmen der jeweiligen faktischen Möglichkeit.}” (\textit{SZ} §60, 298)\(^{160}\) Frustratingly, however, Heidegger gives little account of what precisely is ‘factically possible at the time’, nor any criteria for determining this.

Later work on the ‘history of Being in the West’ was meant to provide a more contextual analysis, resituating fundamental ontology within the historical and geographical location of the modern West. However, for this secondary analysis to be something more than a mere empirical history of the West, Heidegger still needed to demonstrate its connectedness to ontology and the understanding of Being. One way to do this, as Béatrice Han has suggested, would be for Heidegger to posit that there are some modifications “at the ontic level that are so considerable that they act on the very

\(^{159}\) As Heidegger himself put it, “a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intending to overcome metaphysics. Therefore our task is to cease all overcoming, and leave metaphysics to itself.” \textit{Of Time and Being}, Joan Stambaugh (trans.), (NY: Harper and Row, 1972), p.24; \textit{Zur Sache des Denkens}, p.25.

\(^{160}\) “the disclosive projection and determination of \textit{what is factically possible at the time.” (\textit{BTa} § 60, 345)
ontological structure of our existence and modify it.” These modifications, moreover, would not be modifications on the level of consciousness, but would rather unfold on the level of practical involvement. Hence the corresponding form of historical analysis would proceed through an analysis of the basic practices that make up the prevailing modes of revealing in a given epoch. The challenge, then, put forward by Heidegger’s ontological analysis of freedom is to think through the ever-present question of ‘what is factically possible at the time’, but to do so through reference to these basic practices and not via an idealist conceptual history nor through reference to a rationalist teleology.

As noted previously, it was the young Marcuse who first took up this challenge. Marcuse affirmed Heidegger’s ontological analysis, yet at the same time sought a social and historical-materialist complement that might unlock the key determining criteria whereby ‘what was factically possible at the time’ might be disclosed to humankind. In a series of works from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s (including his 1930 habilitation Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity), Marcuse attempted to reformulate Marxist historical materialism in light of Heidegger’s ontology, with particular attention paid to the import of the concept of historicity so central to Division II of Being and Time. Without involving ourselves in a full explication of early Marcuse, we can see that he is grappling with a problematic that leads us into

---

161 Béatrice Han, ‘Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.151.

162 See Chapter One.

163 A collection of these essays is presented in Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (eds.), Heideggerian Marxism (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

164 First published as Hegels Ontologie und die Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1932); translated into English by Seyla Benhabib as Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987)

165 For a general study of the relationship between Heidegger and Marcuse, see Andrew Feenberg, Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History (NY: Routledge, 2005); Alfred
conversation with Foucault: how might Heidegger’s account of freedom as residing within a field of possibilities be complemented with a historical analysis that takes into account the particular factual possibilities of the present without reduction to rationalist determination?

Marcuse had hoped that Marxism could complete this story by demonstrating that Dasein’s historicity is subject to rational dialectic. This move in the attempted synthesis of Heideggerian philosophy and Marxism is the one that, at least from our current vantage point, seemed doomed to fail. It is difficult to see how the Heideggerian notion of historicity could be reconciled with a dialectic of historical materialism since the latter cannot accept the radical contingency and indeterminacy of the former (referred to above as ‘epistemological indeterminacy’). Marxism sought an analysis of the ‘factual possibilities at the time’, but it did so through reference to a single, determinant criterion to which freedom—if it is worthy of the name—must submit. It was on precisely these grounds that Sartre’s long effort to combine existentialism with Marxism also collapsed.

Even if early attempts at bringing Heidegger into conversation with Marxism ultimately failed (by Marcuse’s own admission\textsuperscript{166}), the effort nevertheless strikes at the heart of many of the same issues engaged in here. While Marcuse’s \textit{answer} may seem problematic from the present vantage point, the \textit{question} he first posed—of how to combine ontological and historical modes of critical analysis—remains prescient. Perhaps most importantly we may learn from Marcuse’s work that the possibility of a

\textsuperscript{166} Marcuse did eventually acknowledge that Heidegger may have in the end achieved genuine historical insights to complement his earlier fundamental ontology (“\textit{The Frage nach dem Sein recedes before the Frage nach der Technik},” Marcuse, p.98), but also admitted not knowing enough of Heidegger’s later work.
complementary form of historical analysis to that of Heideggerian ontology evades being subsumed under Marxist (or any other) rationalist teleology. In its place, I suggest, would be an historical ontology that examined the ways in which prevailing modes of practical involvement in a world constitute the ‘clearing’ within which subjects and objects appear as meaningful entities at all.

It is, I believe, Foucault’s late work that provides the richest account of just such an analysis. Gianni Vattimo, who has also linked Heidegger to Foucault in this regard, states that this form of analysis starts with Heidegger’s teaching and goes on to elaborate what might be called, using a term from Foucault’s late period, an ‘ontology of actuality.’

The expression is meant to be taken in its most literal sense: it does not simply indicate, as Foucault thought, a philosophy oriented primarily toward the consideration of existence and its historicity rather than toward epistemology and logic—that is, toward what would be called, in Foucault’s terminology, an ‘analytic of truth.’ Rather, ‘ontology of actuality’ is used here to mean a discourse that attempts to clarify what Being signifies in the present situation.167

What Vattimo doesn’t elaborate on, but is nevertheless crucial, is that the attempt to clarify what “Being signifies” in the present situation must proceed not merely through consciousness, but by reference to the modes of practical involvement by which it is manifest to us. In so doing, an ontology of actuality would also perhaps provide the most promising route to overturning the current understanding of Being by which mastery [Macht], not care, prevails in our relationship to the world and to ourselves. We turn now to Foucault as the most promising vehicle for just such an analysis.

---

Before proceeding on to a discussion of how Foucault’s late writings might help fill out the general problematic of situated freedom following from the previous chapters, it might be helpful to sketch out Foucault’s initial critique of Heidegger. It is not my main interest here to detail the relationship between the two thinkers in all its different facets. This has, at any rate, been done in more detail by others.\footnote{168 See my discussion in Chapter One, Part II.} What is required, however, is a setting of the background of Foucault’s critical relation to Heidegger prior to the later writings on subjectivity, ethics and freedom. To establish this background, I propose looking at three lines of critique running through Foucault’s work prior to 1979, each of which implicate Heidegger. These include:

(A) The historicizing of the phenomenology of ‘experience’;

(B) The critique of hermeneutics, and;

(C) The interrogation of the ‘analytics of finitude’ and its relation to a positing of ‘original man’;

It should be stated at the outset that these lines of critique are not presented in any systematic fashion in Foucault’s work nor do should they necessarily be taken as direct criticisms of Heidegger \textit{per se}. Direct references to Heidegger himself are quite sparse in Foucault’s writings—especially after his first two works. Rather than direct citation, Foucault tends to refer rather obliquely to concepts and terminology we can only assume are meant to be references if not to Heidegger, at least to Heideggerian philosophy.
generally.\textsuperscript{169} Finally, many of these criticisms are general enough that, while the scope of their critique might include Heidegger, they certainly are not \textit{particularly} aimed at him. In fact, Foucault is often speaking of whole intellectual traditions, such as existentialism, phenomenology, hermeneutics and what he calls the ‘analytics of finitude’. In each of these cases, we might say that Heidegger has contributed to the fields. However, it is also true that he did so often in a very idiosyncratic manner, often altering or even reversing the terms of the tradition in a manner that others within it resisted (as with phenomenology). In some cases Heidegger specifically disavowed a relationship to the field of study (as with existentialism), or first embraced it but then later distanced himself from it (as with hermeneutics). Finally, as with Foucault’s analytics of finitude, the net is cast so wide so as to include nearly every philosopher since Kant. Despite all this, these lines of critique, even when not specifically aimed \textit{at} Heidegger, all implicate him (at least in Foucault’s mind: we shall see later whether fairly or not) and stand as obstacles to any attempt to bring the two thinkers together in a fruitful theoretical development.

\textbf{I. Historicizing the Phenomenology of ‘Experience’}

The first line of inquiry and critique actually begins largely from \textit{within} Heideggerian philosophy and only emerges as a critique through a slow process of distancing from and rearticulating of key concepts. The heart of this critique is that while existential phenomenology claims to begin with situated, concrete existence, it does so through recourse to ‘experiences’ which are not themselves given a historical or social

\textsuperscript{169} That is, to those who interpret and self-consciously work within the sets of questions Heidegger developed—Gadamer might be a good example here.
analysis. Such an existential phenomenology (most evident in *Being and Time*) relies therefore on a set of ‘experiences’ that are at best underdeveloped theoretically and at worst merely posited naively. This tension emerges primary in Foucault’s earliest work on madness and psychiatry,\(^{170}\) because it is in these works that Foucault is most interested in such experiences as madness (*folie*), mental illness (*maladie mentale*) and unreason (*déraison*). It should also be noted that although Foucault specifically references Heidegger and Heideggerian scholars in these works, the work here is best taken as a critical engagement with existentialism and phenomenology as it was being articulated in the 50s and early 60s France. Thus, while Heidegger looms large, so too do Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty for instance. In some cases, it is not always clear that Foucault’s criticisms are meant for Heidegger specifically or rather for some other reading of these broad philosophical traditions.

Foucault’s earliest work is his most explicitly Heideggerian, and it is not hard to see why. Heidegger’s work to that point, introduced in France after the Second World War primarily through Sartre and Jean Beaufret, focused on demonstrating that the subject was not a metaphysical ‘thing’, a transcendental ego or an idealist mind. Rather, the subject was always conditioned by its being-in-a-world. Subjectivity was, Heidegger proposed, the centre of a set of relations of meaning, intelligible only against a larger background of practices given to the self by its lifeworld. These practices were relational, temporal and, to some extent unknowable. The subject was, therefore, fundamentally social, historical and occluded from itself. Such a notion of ‘embedded subjectivity’ was of great interest and use to young Foucault. In fact, we might say that

the ‘embedded subject’ in this sense is the presupposition for his early studies of madness and unreason. As Keith Hoeller puts it,

in order to write the history of madness, one must put the patient back into a world again and write the history of madmen and society, patients and doctors. In other words, what all these critics of psychiatry have in common is the Heideggerian notion that human beings are always constituted by the concept of ‘being-in-the-world’, and that ‘madness’ is a societal event which occurs between people who may in fact have conflicting values and goals.\(^{171}\)

In his earliest writings, Foucault explicitly saw this task as an extension of Heideggerian philosophy and consistently deployed language that evoked the tradition of phenomenology. For instance, he describes his task in *The Birth of the Clinic* to examine

\[
\text{où les ‘chooses’ et les ‘mots’ ne sont pas encore séparés, là où s’appartiennent encore, au ras du langage, manière de voir et manière de dire. Il faudra questionner la distribution originaire du visible et de l’invisible dans la mesure où elle est liée au partage de ce qui s’énonce et de ce qui est tu (NC, vii)}\(^{172}\)
\]

Later, again invoking the language of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, he claims that “le rapport du visible à l’invisible [est] nécessaire à tout savoir concret” *(NC, viii).*\(^{173}\) The Foucaultian subject, at this point in his writings, is always a subject constituted by her being-in-the-world, whose experiences are grounded not only in the visible (consciously reflected upon Interpretations), but even more primordially, in the invisible (background Understanding). So, we can see why it is that Foucault would say later in his life that he had taken up existential analysis in a “Heideggerian way”.\(^{174}\)

---


\(^{172}\) “where ‘things’ and ‘worlds’ have not yet been separated, and where—that the most fundamental level of language—seeing and saying are still one. We must reexamine the original distribution of the visible and the invisible insofar as it is linked with the division between what is stated and what remains unsaid” *(BC, xii).*

\(^{173}\) “the relation between the visible and invisible… is necessary to all concrete knowledge” *(BC, xiii).*

\(^{174}\) ‘Interview with Michel Foucault’ (*EW3*, 257). In saying this, Foucault is contrasting himself to R.D. Laing who, he says, took up such analysis in a “more Sartrean” manner.
From this base, however, Foucault began increasingly to distance himself from the language and conceptual tools of post-Heideggerian phenomenology. Even in revised drafts of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, new headings are telling. Part One, written in 1954, is entitled ‘Les dimensions psychologiques de la maladie’, concludes with the chapter ‘La maladie et l’existence’ and is referred to as a “phenomenology of mental illness.” However, Part Two (written in 1962) is called ‘Folie et culture’ and contains chapters on ‘La constitution historique de la maladie mentale’ and ‘La folie, structure globale’. It begins with the following statement, already a form of auto-critique in relation to the first half of the book:

Les analyses précédentes ont fixé les coordonnées par lesquelles les psychologies peuvent situer le fait pathologique. Mais si elles ont montré les formes d’apparition de la maladie, elles n’ont pas pu en démontrer les conditions d’apparition. L’erreur serait de croire que l’évolution organique, l’histoire psychologique, ou la situation de l’homme dans le monde puissent révéler ces conditions. (*MMP*, 71)

Thus, we can see Foucault is beginning to open cracks between the two parts of the post-Heideggerian phenomenological project. On the one hand, the subject is thoroughly *situated* in a world. On the other hand, however, claims to known this situatedness rest upon the presence of existential ‘experiences’ whose historical and social situatedness are never themselves interrogated. These two halves of the phenomenological project at the time point to a general movement away from the individual subject in its world towards histories of forms of experience, constituted socially. In other words, Foucault began to show not only *that* the subject was conditioned by its being-in-the-world, but more

175 Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, p. 46
176 “The preceding analyses have fixed the coordinates by which psychologies can situate the pathological fact. But although they showed the forms of appearance of the illness, they have been unable to show its condition of appearance. It would be a mistake to believe that organic evolution, psychological history, or the situation of man in the world may reveal these conditions.” (*MIP*, 60)
precisely how it was so. So while it is clear that Foucault saw his early work as a
continuation of the path opened up by Heidegger, it is also clear that he quickly began to
use the general insight into historicality and deploy it against Heidegger’s work itself.
The first point of reversal involves the status of existential ‘experiences’.

To get at Foucault’s uneasiness with the existential-phenomenological category of
‘experience’, we might begin by asking: how does Heidegger develop his claim into the
historicality of Dasein? As we saw in Chapter Two on Being and Time, Heidegger
claims we can arrive at this insight by beginning from a phenomenology of concrete
experiences, specifically ones such as dread, boredom, angst, fear, etc. When we
examine these experiences and inquire into why they occur, we find not merely personal
psychological reasons (i.e., I have a fear of water now because I once almost drowned),
but also existential grounds. Namely, we discover that our selfhood is only experientially
accessible to us through a preexisting world that matters to us and is meaningful. As
Hubert Dreyfus puts it, Existenzialen “reveal[s] Dasein as dependent upon a public
system of significances that it did not produce.”\(^{177}\) This ‘system of significances’—this
world—is the precondition for our subjectivity. This insight into the existential ground
of our experiences is the basis on which philosophers and psychologists of this time tried
to develop an existential psychology based on Daseinsanalysis. Thinkers in this tradition
included Ludwig Binswanger, Medard Boss, Viktor Frankl, and Karl Jaspers. Foucault
was familiar with this school of thought. In fact, one of Foucault’s first published
works—written in 1953 while he was still a doctoral student— was ‘Dream, Imagination

and Existence’, preface to the French translation to Binswanger’s *Traum und Existenz*, first published in 1930.178

The connection between experiential events such as dread or being-towards-death and the insight into our historicity is, however, incomplete when it cannot account for the conditions of the event itself. To account for the possibility of such experiences would require a *social history of forms of experience*. While this social history was secondary to the existential phenomenologists, it became clear even in the writing of works such as *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Madness*, that this was the heart of the study of ‘embedded subjectivity’. As Foucault put it in a retrospective moment in 1984:

> at the time I was working on my book about the history of madness, I was divided between existential psychology and phenomenology, and my research was an attempt to discover the extent these could be defined in historical terms.179

Two new lines of inquiry not accessible to existential phenomenology at the time were thus opened up by Foucault’s appropriation of the categories of experience during this period: (1) What makes such experiences possible? What are the historical conditions of possibility for the experience of ‘death’, ‘angst’ or ‘madness’ in their current formulations? (2) By what mechanisms can we access the truth of these experiences? What are the techniques which allow us to see experiences ‘existentially’ and what makes these techniques available? Existential phenomenology after Heidegger had promised to demonstrate that experiences of ‘death’ and ‘angst’ (for example) could open us up to an

---


awareness of the ground of our selfhood and being as relational, temporal and free. However, it had not shown how such experiences could come into existence in the first place—how they became possible ‘things’ for us to experience, think about and analyze in their historical specificity. Secondly, it had not analyzed the techniques by which the gap between the ‘everyday’ and the ‘fundamental’ or ‘authentic’ experience of the event could be traversed. Foucault’s answer to these questions was to point to the specific historical conditions under which (1) forms of experience are presented to the subject and (2) techniques of verification and analysis are made manifest through institutional practices.

One example of this that most directly speaks to Heidegger’s concerns is Foucault’s analysis of death in The Birth of the Clinic. In this work Foucault attempted to analyze the social and institutional mechanisms that made possible the “introduction of death into knowledge.” Foucault highlighted the fact that death was not a ‘primordial’ condition for grasping the historicality of human existence. Rather, it too was an event with a history. In the late 18th century, he claimed, ‘death’ was rediscovered as a theme, only to become more pronounced and significant in the 19th century. It was only in the 19th century that death took on the function that Heidegger ascribes to it: as an ‘experience’ which raises the individual from average, everyday life and makes its authentic individuality possible. Foucault writes that it was only under these historical conditions that death became constitutive...de singularité; c’est en elle que l’individu se rejoint, échappant aux vies monotones et à leur nivellement; dans l’approche lente, à moitié souterraine,

---

mais visible déjà de la mart, la sourde vie commune deviant enfin individualité; un cerne noir l’isole et lui donne le style de sa vérité. (NC, 176)\(^{181}\)

Elsewhere, in a passage that even more directly implicates Heidegger within a historical tradition, Foucault writes that this understanding of death is then reinscribed back into the living bodies of subjects through institutional power, making it possible for us to experience death in a new way. Only through the institutionalization of the new form of ‘death’ could it really be experienced as a living event, as an existential:

C’est lorsque la mort s’est intégrée épistémologiquement à l’expérience médicale que la maladie a pu se détacher de la contre-nature et prendre corps dans le corps vivant des individus.

Il restera sans doute décisif pour notre culture que le premier discours scientifique tenu par elle sur l’individu ait dû passer par ce moment de la mort...

Et d’une façon générale, l’expérience de l’individualité dans la culture moderne est peut-être liée à celle de la mort: des cadavres ouverts de Bichet à l’homme freudien, un rapport obstiné à la mort prescrit à l’universel son visage singulier et prête à la parole de chacun le pouvoir d’être indéfiniment entendue; l’individu lui doit un sens qui ne s’arrête pas avec lui. (NC, 201)\(^{182}\)

---

\(^{181}\)“constitutive of singularity; it is in that perception of death that the individual finds himself, escaping from a monotonous, average life; in the slow, half-subterranean, but already visible approach of death, the dull, common life becomes an individuality at last; a black border isolates it and gives it the style of its own truth.” (BC, 211) Foucault continues this line of reasoning in The History of Madness, particularly in Chapter I, ‘Stultifera Navis’, where he links the rise of a modern conception of madness to transformations in our understanding of madness.

\(^{182}\)“It was when death became the concrete a priori of medical experience that death could detach itself from counter-nature and become embodied in the living bodies of individuals.

It will no doubt remain decisive for our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death... generally speaking, the experience of individuality in modern culture is perhaps bound up with that of death: from Bichet’s open cadavers to Freudian man, an obstinate relation to death prescribes to the universal its singular face, and lends to each individual the power of being heard forever; the individual owes to death a meaning that does not cease with him.” (my translation).

The standard English translation of Naissance de la Clinique was first published in 1973 and is based upon a revised version of the original text. Thus, the translation is not based on the French text above. It reads:

“It was when death became integrated epistemologically into the medical experience that illness could detach itself from the counter-nature and become embodied in the living bodies of individuals.

It will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death... And, generally speaking, the experience of individuality in modern culture is bound up with that of death: from Hölderlin’s Empedocles to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, and on to Freudian man, an obstinate relation to death prescribes to the universal its singular face, and lends to each individual the power of being heard forever; the individual owes to death a meaning that does not cease with him.” (BC, 243)
Thus, Foucault could implicate the “fundamental structures of experience” with the history of institutional developments in clinical medicine and psychiatry. This meant that the phenomenon of experience, which Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty had relied upon as secret keys (that is, hidden to the subject and in need of interpretation) to the existential fact of our social, historical and ultimately contingent subjectivities, was taken down from its quasi-positivist status as ‘event’ beyond or before discourse. As Foucault put it at the end of *The Birth of the Clinic*,

> Mais quand on fait, de ce positivisme, l’investigation verticale, on voit apparaître, à la fois cache par lui mais indispensable pour qu’il naisse, toute une série de figures qui seront délivrées par la suite et paradoxalement utilisées contre lui. En particulier, ce que la phenomenology lui opposera avec le plus d’obstination était présent déjà dans le système de ses conditions: les pouvoirs significants de perçu et sa correlation avec le langage dans les formes originaires de l’expérience, l’organisation de l’objectivité à partir des valeurs du signe, la structure secrètement linguistique du donné, le caractère constitutif de la spatialité corporelle, l’importance de la finitude dans le rapport de l’homme à la vérité et dans le fondement de ce rapport, tout cela était déjà mis en jeu dans la genèse du positivisme. Mis en jeu, mais oublié à son profit. Si bien que la pensée contemporaine, croyant lui avoir échappé depuis la fin du XIXe siècle, n’a fait que redécouvrir peu à peu ce qui l’avait rendu possible. La culture européenne, dans les dernières années du XVIIIe siècle, a dessiné une structure qui n’est pas encore dénouée; à peine commence-t-on à en débrouiller quelques fils, qui nous sont encore si inconnus que nous les prenons volontiers pour merveilleusement nouveaux ou absolument archaïques, alors que, depuis deux siècles (pas mois et cependant pas beaucoup plus), ils ont constitué la trame sombre mais solide de notre expérience. (NC, 202-203)\(^{183}\)

\(^{183}\) “when one carries out a vertical investigation of this positivism, one sees the emergence of a whole series of figures—hidden by it, but also indispensable to its birth—that will be released later, and, paradoxically, used against it. In particular, that with which phenomenology was to oppose it so tenaciously was already present in its underlying structures: the original powers of the perceived and its correlation with language in the original forms of experience, the organization of objectivity on the basis of sign values, the secretly linguistic structure of the datum, the constitutive character of corporal spatiality, the importance of finitude in the relation of man with truth, and in the foundation of this relation, all this was involved in the genesis of positivism. Involved, but forgotten to its advantage. So much so that contemporary thought, believing that it has escaped it since the end of the nineteenth century, has merely rediscovered, little by little, that which made it possible. In the last years of the eighteenth century, European culture outlined a structure that has not yet been unraveled; we are only just beginning to disentangle a few of the threads, which are still so unknown to us that we immediately assume them to be
Clearly this passage stands as an indictment of phenomenology after Heidegger, indicating that it secretly relies upon a positivism—the positivism of an ‘experience’ which is simply ‘given’ or made present to observation before the act of interpretation—in order to ground its insights into the historicality of the subject. If the subject is grounded only its open-ended historicality—in what I have called ontological freedom in a previous chapter—then the claim is reversed backwards upon phenomenology itself and comes to be the source of an interrogation about the historical nature of our existential ‘experiences’. We have yet to “démontrer les conditions d’apparition” (MMP, 71).

Otherwise, such a phenomenology risks reifying uncritically the standpoint of the subject, as least when it comes to her existential experiences. By the time of The Order of Things, Foucault had almost completely abandoned his early interest in existential phenomenology on precisely these grounds. In the foreword to the English edition, written in 1970, Foucault was clear:

If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity—which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to a theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice. (OT, xv)

To put it in the terms employed in Chapter One, Foucault here is resisting the need to relate a theory of historical development via the philosophy of the constituting subject.

Of course, it took time for Foucault to take such a strong position. In fact, much of his own earliest work could be criticized on these terms. While Foucault’s early work opened up the possibility of studying ‘madness’ and ‘death’ as historically singular forms either marvelously new or absolutely archaic, whereas for two hundred years (not less, yet not much more) they have constituted the dark, but firm web of our experience.” (BC, 246)
of experiences always already conditioned by institutional power, it did so by implicitly relying on other ‘primordial experiences’ that were not themselves given full account. This appears to be, for instance, the role that Unreason (déraison) plays in relation to mental illness (maladie mentale) and madness (folie) during this time. Unreason is a more basic, primordial form of experience that seems to preceed (and, at times, evade) the institutional production of mental illness and madness. In this sense, then, Foucault’s early works don’t escape his own critique. Instead, they too labour under what John Caputo calls ‘phenomenological naivete’. Caputo writes that

The goal of the early writings, which is to find an ‘undifferentiated’ experience of unreason, before it is differentiated into reason and madness, before the lines of reason are drawn in its virginal sands, perfectly parallels the phenomenological goal of finding a realm of pure ‘prepredicative’ experience, prior to its being carved up by the categories of logical grammar.\(^{184}\)

All this is to say, however, that Foucault was at this time working both with and against the phenomenological category of ‘experience’ in hopes that it would open up the possibility of a concrete historical philosophy. One might argue that this reversal, this folding backwards upon itself, is precisely what Heidegger proposes as the necessary trajectory for a new phenomenology. Rather than ground phenomenology in the structures of consciousness (as with Husserl), Heidegger anticipated Foucault’s objection that phenomenology historicize its own knowledge in the form of hermeneutics. As made explicit in sections 31 and 32 of Being and Time, but generally elaborated upon throughout his writings, Heidegger sought to embrace precisely the form of an ongoing process of disclosure and reflexive interpretation as foundational to understanding.

Understanding here refers not to a state of mind or a level of analysis, but rather to the conditions of intelligibility themselves. This means that Heidegger’s use of the term ‘hermeneutic’ to describe his work in *Being and Time* is meant to evoke not a reconstruction of a specific mode of analysis (a cultural, linguistic or historical field as distinction from the form of analysis particular to the natural sciences, as exemplified by the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey) but rather to demonstrate the interrelationship between understanding and ontology. As Gadamer put it,

> Heidegger’s temporal analytics of Dasein has, I think, shown convincingly that understanding is not just one of the various possible behaviors of the subject but the mode of being of Dasein itself... and hence embraces the whole of its experience of the world. (*TM*, xxx)

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the categories of experience in Heidegger were always meant to be taken as historical, even if Heidegger himself did not open them up as such. What this suggests is that a complementary form of historical analysis is required to complete the ontology Heidegger first proposed. More will be said on this a point of possible rapprochement between Heidegger and Foucault in the next chapters. What matters at this stage of the discussion is merely to point out Foucault’s initial uneasiness with the quasi-positivist status of ‘experiences’ in post-Heideggerian existential phenomenology.

II. Critique of Hermeneutics

The leads us to the second line of critique which implicates Heidegger: Foucault’s critique of hermeneutics and its relation to what he later calls confessional or pastoral power. As we saw above, Foucault employed the broad Heideggerian insight into the constitutive function of background practices vis-à-vis objects of knowledge (i.e., that in
order for something to appear as an object for inquiry, it must first be disclosed by a
general field of knowledge which is itself grounded in embodied practices and is not, in
any general holistic manner, available to inquiry itself) in order to critically historicize
supposedly ahistorical experiential categories such as ‘madness’ and ‘death’. We also
saw that while this is, in a broad sense, a deployment of Heideggerian thought (the
connection to which Foucault made explicit in his earliest writings), it was also a critique
and reversal of it. Most clearly, we can see this with Foucault’s discussion of death. If
Foucault is correct that the contemporary experience of death began, as he says, “in the
last years of the eighteenth century”, then this undermines Heidegger’s assertion, in
Division II of *Being and Time*, that ‘being-towards-death’ is an (ahistorical) existential.
More important, however, is Foucault’s critique of how we investigate such existentials.

II.A. ‘Deep’ Interpretation

For Heidegger, in order for an ‘everyday’ experience (such as that of fear) to open
up reflection on our existential condition generally, it requires a specific set of techniques
which can raise us from the level of ‘everyday understanding’ to ‘fundamental ontology’.
These techniques are not the epistemological techniques given by traditional philosophic
models in the West (whereby foundational premises are sought that are true and
necessary which can then lead to conclusions via proper inferences). Rather, Heidegger
draws upon the hermeneutic tradition to suggest that a new set of relational activities are
the techniques of knowledge appropriate for us to grasp fundamental ontology. These
activities are gathered under the name ‘interpretation’. There are actually two different
terms that Heidegger employs which both can be translated as ‘interpretation’: *Auslegung* and *Interpretierung*. David Hoy usefully clarifies the distinction thusly:

*Auslegung*, the standard translation of which is ‘interpretation’ with a lower-case ‘i,’ includes the everyday phenomena of ordinary skills like hammer, typing, or driving. *Interpretierung*, translated as ‘Interpretation’ with an upper-case ‘I,’ includes thematized, discursive articulation and theorization. *Interpretierung* is itself said to be a derived form of *Auslegung*, but Heidegger obviously does not mean to denigrate *Interpretierung* since that is what *Being and Time* is.  

*Auslegung* refers then to the form of thought that is required for everyday coping within sets of practices. It is, therefore, not contrasted with Understanding (as pre-reflexive) but is rather the making explicit of the form of knowledge already within Understanding, upon which *Auslegung* is always already reliant. *Auslegung* is a specific practice by which one makes explicit the meaning of things already grasped by Understanding through the working out of possibilities already latent within everyday use of things as equipment. As Heidegger writes:

> Die Ausbildung des Verstehens nennen wir Auslegung… In der Auslegung wird das Verstehen nicht etwas anderes, sondern es selbst. Auslegung gründet existenzial im Verstehen, und nicht entsteht dieses durch jene. Die Auslegung ist nicht die Kenntnisnahme des Verstandenen, sondern die Ausarbeitung der im Verstehen entworfenen Möglichkeiten. (SZ §32, 148)  

*Interpretierung*, on the other hand, is a specific instance of *Auslegung*, one that does not try to ‘think’ a specific activity (such as hammering, typing or driving), but rather attempts to ‘think’ *Auslegung* existentially, that is, in relation to its ground within a lifeworld, in relation to the condition of Being-in-the-world. It is in this sense that

---


186 “This development of the understanding we call ‘interpretation’… In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation is grounded existentially in understanding; the latter does not arise from the former. Nor is interpretation the acquiring of information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.” (BTa §32, 188-189)
Heidegger offers *Being and Time* as an *Interpretation* of the everyday activity of  

*Auslegung:*

‘Verstehen’ dagegen im Sinne einer möglichen Erkenntnisart unter anderen, etwa unterschieden von ‘Erklären’, muß mit diesem als existenziales Derivat des primären, das Sein des Da überhaupt mitkonstituierenden Verstehens interpretiert werden. (SZ §32, 143)\(^{187}\)

In other words, while Heidegger thinks that ‘interpretation’ can replace the traditional model of epistemology as a technique for apprehending the structure of reality, he is unclear on the status of this claim itself. In order to account for this insight, Heidegger differentiates between two ‘levels’ of interpretation: one is the everyday activities of relating thought to background understanding, the other is a specific activity that attempts to reconstruct the conditions for this first activity. It is, I believe, this ‘second-order’ notion of interpretation that Foucault picks up on and submits to critique. More generally, when Foucault uses the term ‘hermeneutics’ he is most often referring to the general philosophic tradition that (contrary to the rationalist model) grounds its claims to knowledge not in the grasping of final, certain, ‘clear and distinct’ ideas, but rather in the ongoing activity of ‘Interpretation’ in the two senses outlined above. Thus, Foucault’s critique of hermeneutics also implicates Heidegger. This critique actually has five main features: First, interpretation in this sense opens up a gap between the signifier and the signified which cannot be closed, or even fully explained. Second, the task of closing this gap is given over to an ‘interpreter’ whose position of epistemic privilege masks the function of power in the interpretive act. Third, it is precisely the infinite task of closing this gap that permits the hermeneutic project to drive ever inward to the very heart, soul,  

\(^{187}\) ‘Understanding’ in the sense of one possible kind of cognizing among others (as distinguished, for instance, from ‘explaining’) must, like explaining, be interpreted as an existential derivative of that primary understanding which is one of the constituents of Being of the ‘there’ in general. (*BTo*, §31, p.182)
inner unconscious, etc. of the signifier, demanding the infinite intensification of interpretive techniques and analytics. Fourth, the hermeneutic project thus masks its origins not in an interpretive problem but rather in the historically situated and ever changing requirements of institutional power. Finally, such a process relies upon an implicit (if not also explicit) claim to a hidden truth about ‘original man’—some state of pure, authentic subjectivity wherein signifier and signified were once one (this part of the critique is dealt with below under the heading of ‘The analytics of finitude’). Each of these claims needs to be unpacked in turn.

II.B. Excess of the Signified

Foucault’s clearest and most extended treatment of the problem of signifier and signified in modern hermeneutics comes from the introduction to The Birth of the Clinic. There he addresses himself directly to the hermeneutic tradition (derisively referring to it as ‘commentary’) and is worth quoting at length:

[Commentaire] interroge le discours sur ce qu’il dit et voulu dire; il cherche à faire surgi ce double fond de la parole, où elle se retrouve en une identité à elle-même qu’on suppose plus proche de sa vérité; il s’agit, en énonçant ce qui a été dit, de redire ce qui n’a jamais été prononcée. Dans cette activité de commenaire qui cherche à faire passer un discours resserré, ancien et comme silencieux à lui-même dans un autre plus bavard, à la fois plus archaïque et plus contemporain, se cache une étrange attitude à l’égard du langage: commenter, c’est admettre par définition un excès du signifié sur le significant, un reste nécessairement non formulé de la pensée que le langage a laissé dans l’ombre, résidu qui en est l’essence elle-même, poussée hors de son secret; mais commenter suppose aussi que ce non-parlé dort dans la parole, et que, par une surabondance propre au significant, on peut en l’interrogeant faire parler un contenu qui n’était pas explicitement signifié. Cette double plethora, en ouvrant la possibilité du commentaire, nous vole à une tâche infinie que rien ne peut limiter: il y a toujours du signifié qui demeure et auquel il faut encore donner la parole; quant au significant, il est toujours offert en une richesse qui nous interroge malgré nous sur ce qu’elle ‘veut dire’. Signifiant et signifié prennent ainsi une autonomie substantiellement qui assure à chacun d’eux isolément le trésor d’une signification
Contained within this passage are several important points. First is Foucault’s claim that “commenter, c’est admettre par définition un excès du signifié sur le signifiant.” The basic premise of hermeneutic interpretation is that meaning cannot be reduced to merely what was actually said. The signified (the meaning which is projected in language and behaviour) is not reducible to the intentions of the signifier. Thus, the signified is always ‘in excess’ of the signifier. This opens up a gap—an ‘espace supposé’—between that which is literally said and that which is actually meant. Into this gap steps the interpreter.

It is the role of the hermeneutic interpreter to grasp the full significance of what was said, to bring it to a deeper, more profound or more comprehensive account, one not accessible to the signifier herself. However, as Foucault points out, this gap can never be

---

188 “Commentary questions discourse as to what it says and intended to say; it tries to uncover the deeper meaning of speech that enables it to achieve an identity with itself, supposedly nearer to its essential truth; in other words, in stating what has been said, one has to re-state what has never been said. In this activity known as commentary which tries to transmit an old, unyielding discourse seemingly silent to itself, into another, more prolix discourse that is both more archaic and more contemporary—is concealed a strange attitude towards language: to comment is to admit by definition an excess of the signified over the signifier; a necessary shade—a remainder that is the very essence of that thought, driven outside its secret—but to comment also presupposes that this unspoken element slumbers within speech (parole), and that, by a superabundance proper to the signifier, one may, in questioning it, give voice to a content that was not explicitly signified. By opening up the possibility of commentary, this double plethora dooms us to an endless task that nothing can limit: there is always a certain amount of signified remaining that must be allowed to speak, while the signifier is always offered to us in an abundance that questions us, in spite of ourselves, as to what it ‘means’ (vouent dire). Signifier and signified thus assume a substantial autonomy that accords the treasure of a virtual signification to each of them separately; one may even exist without the other, and begin to speak of itself: commentary resides in that supposed space. But at the same time, it invents a complex link between them, a whole tangled web that concerns the poetic values of expression: the signifier is not supposed to ‘translate’ without concealing, without leaving the signified with an inexhaustible reserve; the signified is revealed only in the visible, heavy world of a signifier that is itself burdened with a meaning that it cannot control. Commentary rests on the postulate that speech (parole) is an act of ‘translation’.” (BC, xvii-xix)
completely closed off. Rather, the excess of meaning will always ‘run ahead of’ the particular articulations which attempt to encapsulate them. This, as we saw in previous chapters, is precisely what Heidegger intends to say. It is one of the bases on which we can speak of an ontological freedom—the infinite projectedness of meaning beyond the field of the intelligible dooms us to endless perform within the hermeneutic circle. For Foucault, however, the hermeneutic circle of interpretation is “une tâche infinite que rien ne peut limiter.” Or, as he reiterated in the later essay, ‘Nietzsche, Marx, Freud,’ it is one of the main “characteristic[s] of hermeneutics [that] interpretation finds itself with the obligation to interpret itself to infinity, always to resume.” (EW2, 277) Foucault’s ‘archaeological period’, incorporating The Order of Things and The Archaeology of Knowledge, might be read as an attempt to study language without resorting to the hermeneutic circle. Such an analysis could proceed if the gap between signifier and signified were collapsed by a structuralism that reduced the signifier (the speaking subject) to merely the bearer of semantic rules which precede and, indeed, constitute her.

189 Heidegger, in fact, readily concedes this ‘infinite task’. The circle of interpretation is not merely a negative loop in his hermeneutic phenomenology. Rather, it is the basis on which understanding unfolds within the condition of ontological freedom. As Heidegger writes,

Dieser Zirkel des Verstehens ist nicht ein Kreis, in dem sich eine beliebige Erkenntnisart bewegt, sondern er ist der Ausdruck der existenzialen Vor-struktur des Daseins selbst. Der Zirkel darf nicht zu einem vitiosum und sei es auch zu einem geduldeten herabgezogen werden. In ihm verbirgt sich eine positive Möglichkeit urprünglichsten Erkennens, die freilich in echter Weise nur dann ergriffen ist, wenn die Aufgabe bleibt, sich jeweils Vorhabe, Vorsicht und Vorgriff nicht durch Einfälle und Volksbegriffe vorgeben zu lassen, sondern in deren Ausarbeitung aus den Sachen selbst her has wissenschaftliche Thema zu sichern. (SZ §32, 153)

“This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.” (BTA §32, 195)
This form of analysis is precisely what Foucault imagines in *The Birth of the Clinic*, already anticipating his archaeologies, when he writes:

N’est-il pas possible de faire une analyse des discours qui échapperait à la fatalité du commentaire en ne supposant nul reste, nul excès en ce qui a été dit, mais le seul fait de son apparition historique? Alors apparaîtrait l’histoire systématique des discours. (NC, xiii)\(^{190}\)

Of course, such an analysis runs up against its own problems. By collapsing the signifier into the signified—reducing the speaking subject to merely the ‘object-effect’ of semantic rules governed by a hermetically sealed épistémè, Foucault’s archaeologies struggled to account for modification over time of the rules governing symbols and knowledge, but also struggled to account for its own condition of possibility (that is, the structuralism was so totalizing so as to consume the archaeologist’s standpoint as well). This is mentioned only peripherally here since it is not necessary to look at the critiques of Foucault’s archaeological works in much detail. What we are trying to signal here is only how Foucault’s early work on épistémè as systems of knowledge with little or no room for an active speaking subject emerged in part out of a frustration with the ‘infinite task’—between signifier and signified, between interpretation and understanding—in post-Heideggerian hermeneutics.

**II.C. Pastoral Power**

The third aspect of Foucault’s critique of hermeneutics is more explicitly political and is the one feature of his critique that remained relatively unchanged throughout his career. This critique is pursued through a demonstration of the interrelationship between

---

\(^{190}\) “Is it not possible to make a structural analysis of discourses that would evade the fate of commentary by supposing no remainder, nothing in excess of what has been said, but only the fact of its historical appearance?... A systematic history of discourses would then become possible.” (*BC*, xix)
hermeneutic philosophy and what he calls confessional or pastoral power. Just as Foucault had attempted to show in his first works on madness, the ‘discovery’ of a field of knowledge owes more to the changing demands of institutional power than it does to the uncovering of a truth that was previously hidden. Hermeneutic philosophy, Foucault argues, is equally bound up with the development of institutional and disciplinary power. The key link here is that hermeneutic philosophy can only arise through a positing of an ‘inner’ self that is simultaneously more fundamental and more occluded than our ‘outer’, public self. The notion that there is an inner, authentic self that requires interpretation is, according to Foucault, made possible in the first instance not by theoretical discoveries or cultural transformations, but rather by transformations in practices of governance. The specifics of this claim cannot be totally elaborated on here, but I will attempt at least to give a general outline.

According to Foucault, hermeneutics relationship to pastoral power begins with transformations in Christian confessional practices, particularly in the 4th and 5th centuries. It was then that various practices such as confession, renunciation, mediation, purification, etc., no longer served as preparatory work which aimed to make the subject fit to receive truth from an external source. Instead, the relationship was reversed, and the practices came to serve a disciplinary function. These practices became not ‘tests of the self’, but rather techniques of extraction used to draw out the hidden truth which was posited to reside ‘within’ the subject. It was only through these new interpretive practices that the subject could release the truth of itself. As a key turning point in this historical story, Foucault contrasts Marcus Aurelius with the 4th century theologian Cassian. With Cassian and the early Christian theologians,

191 These practices are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six as ‘spiritual activities’.
Later on in the text, Foucault summarizes and makes more explicit the tripartite relation between this new question of truth, the hermeneutic tradition and pastoral institutions such as the confession. He writes,

Je crois que le moment où la tâche de dire-vrai sur soi-même a été inscrite dans la procédure indispensable au salut, lorsque cette obligation de dire-vrai sur soi-même a été inscrite dans les techniques d’élaboration, de transformation du sujet par lui-même, lorsque cette obligation a été inscrite dans les institutions pastorals—eh bien, tout ceci constitue, je crois, un moment absolument capital dans l’histoire de la subjectivité en Occident, ou dans l’histoire des rapports entre sujet et vérité. Bien sûr ce n’est pas un moment précis et particulier, c’est en fait tout un processus complexe avec ses scansions, ses conflits, ses evolutions lentes, ses précipitations, etc. Mais enfin, si on prend là-dessus un regard historique un peu plongeant, je crois qu’il faut considérer comme un événement de haute portée, dans les rapports entre sujet et vérité, le moment où dire-vrai sur soi-même est devenu un principe fundamental dans le rapport du sujet à lui-même, et où dire-vrai sur soi-même est devenu un élément nécessaire à l’appartenance de l’individu à une communauté. Le jour, si vous voulez, où le refus de la confession, au moins une fois par an, a été motif d’excommunication. (HS-1, 346)

With Cassian and the Christian pastoral tradition, truth is no longer grounded in tests of existence, but rather “il s’agit de prescrire une attitude herméneutique à l’égard de soi-

---

192 “we will have moved on to a regime in which the subject’s relationship to truth will not be governed simply by the purpose: ‘how to become a subject of veridiction,’ but will have become: ‘how to be able to say the truth about oneself.’” (HS-2, 362)

193 “It is, I think, an absolutely crucial moment in the history of subjectivity in the West, or in the relations between subjectivity and truth, when the task and obligation of truth-telling about oneself is inserted within the procedure indispensable for salvation, within techniques of the development and transformation of the subject by himself, and within pastoral institutions. Of course, this is not a precise and definite moment and is in fact a whole complex process with breaks, conflicts, slow evolutions, sudden surges, etcetera. But still, if we take a historical overview on all this, I think we should consider it a highly significant event in the relations between the subject and truth when truth-telling about oneself become a condition of salvation, a fundamental element in the individual’s membership of a community. The day, if you like, when refusal to confess at least once a year was grounds for excommunication.” (HS-2, 364)
mêne: déchiffrer ce qu’il peut y avoir de concupiscence dans des pensées apparemment innocentes.” (HS-I, 483-484)\textsuperscript{194}

Of course, even if one accepts this hypothesis about transformations in early Christianity, we are still a long way from a critique of modern hermeneutics. The connection between modern hermeneutics (in which Foucault includes Heidegger) and pastoral power is made through the extension of specific fields of knowledge/power from the early Christian world to the modern hermeneutic sciences, especially psychology and psychiatry. Sexuality, as a body of knowledge, an institutional discourse and a personal practice, is the paradigmatic case for Foucault of just such a field. He writes,

\begin{quote}
au lieu de faire le compte des erreurs, des naïvetés, des moralismes qui ont peuplé au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle les discours de vérité sur le sexe, il vaudrait mieux repérer les procédés par lesquels cette volonté de savoir relative au sexe, qui caractérise l’Occident moderne, a fait fonctionner les rituels de l’aveu dans les schémas de la régularité scientifique: comment est-on parvenu à constituer cette immense et traditionnelle extorsion d’aveu sexuel des formes scientifiques? (VS, 87)\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

Foucault then goes on to list five of these mechanisms by which the confession came to be constituted in its current scientific form.

1. \textit{Through a clinical codification of the inducement to speak.}
2. \textit{Through the postulate of a general and diffuse causality.}
3. \textit{Through the principle of latency intrinsic to sexuality.}
4. \textit{Through the method of interpretation.}
5. \textit{Through the medicalization of the effects of confession. (VS, 87-90; HSI, 65-67)}

On the fourth point, regarding ‘interpretation’, he adds that

\begin{quote}
“s’il faut avouer, ce n’est pas seulement parce que celui auquel on avoue aurait le pouvoir de pardonner, de consoler et de diriger. C’est que le travail de la vérité à produire, si on veut scientifiquement le valider, doit passer par cette relation. Elle ne réside pas dans le seul sujet qui, en avouant, la porterait toute faite à la lumière.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{194} “a matter of prescribing a hermeneutic attitude towards oneself: deciphering possible concupiscence in apparently innocent thoughts” (HS-2, 503).

\textsuperscript{195} “instead of adding up the errors, naïvetés, and moralisms that plagued the nineteenth-century discourse of truth concerning sex, we would do better to locate the procedures by which that will to knowledge regarding sex, which characterizes the modern Occident, caused the rituals of confession to function within the norms of scientific regularity: how did this immense and traditional extortion of the sexual confession come to be constituted in scientific terms?” (HSI, 65)
Elle se constitue en partie double: présente, mais incomplète, aveugle à elle-même chez celui qui recueille. A lui de dire la vérité de cette vérité obscure: il faut doubler la révélation de l’aveu par le déchiffrement de ce qu’il dit. Celui quiécoute ne sera pas simplement le maître du pardon, le juge qui condamne ou tient quitte; il sera le maître de la vérité. Sa fonction est hermeneutique. Par rapport à l’aveu, son pouvoir n’est pas seulement de l’exiger, avant qu’il soit fait, ou de décider, après qu’il a été proféré; il est de constituer, à travers lui et en le décryptant, un discours de vérité. En faisant de l’aveu, non plus une preuve, mais un signe, et de la sexualité quelque chose à interpréter, le XIXᵉ siècle s’est donné la possibilité de faire fonctionner les procédures d’aveu dans la formation régulière d’un discours scientifique. (VS, 89-90)

So, we can see here that Foucault wants to directly link up confessional power, the sciences of mental health and interpretive hermeneutics, particularly as they converge in the nineteenth century. The thesis regarding the interrelationship between interpretive hermeneutics and pastoral power is more clearly observable in the specific case of psychology as both a field of knowledge and an institutional system of organization, discipline and control. It takes the discussion too far a field to engage with Foucault’s wide-ranging and complex critique of psychology and psychoanalysis, but since they are for Foucault part of the hermeneutic tradition and related to pastoral power, it is at least important to note as a specific instance of the general thesis that implicates hermeneutic philosophy.

Besides merely ‘historicizing’ the phenomenological experience of ‘madness’ in his early works, Foucault also sought to demonstrate that the constitution of a field of

---

196 “If one had to confess, this was not merely because the person to whom one confessed had the power to forgive, console, and direct, but because the work of producing the truth was obliged to pass through this relationship if it was to be scientifically validated. The truth did not reside solely in the subject who, by confessing, would reveal it wholly formed. It was constituted in two stages: present but incomplete, blind to itself, in the one who spoke, it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it. It was the latter’s function to verify this obscure truth: the revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said. The one who listened was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth. His was a hermeneutic function... By no longer making the confession a test, but rather a sign, and by making sexuality something to be interpreted, the nineteenth century gave itself the possibility of causing the procedures of confession to operate within the regular formation of a scientific discourse.” (HSI, 66-67)
knowledge was already implicated in a set of institutional demands of governance and discipline. This is not to say that the human sciences are directly derivative of the particular institutions in which they first appeared historically. But it is to implicate them deeply in the matrix of disciplinary technologies of truth and power that Foucault is trying to analyze. His clearest statement on this relationship comes in *Discipline and Punish*, where he makes the link between the human sciences and the prison system, or ‘carceral network’, explicitly:

Il ne s’agit pas de dire que de la prison sont sorties les sciences humaines. Mais si elles ont pu se former et produire dans l’épistémê tous les effets de bouleversement qu’on connaîit, c’est qu’elles ont été portées par une modalité spécifique et nouvelle de pouvoir... Le réseau carcéral constitue une des armatures de ce pouvoir-savoir qui a rendu historiquement possible les sciences humaines. L’homme connaissable (âme, individualité, conscience, conduite, peu importe ici) est l’effect-object de cet investissement analytique, de cette domination-observation. (*SP*, 356-357)

When we take this general thesis into the particular relationship of pastoral power to interpretive hermeneutics, we might say that the emergence of a field in which language was seen as a key to unlocking the hidden inner truth of the subject is made historically possible by the development of institutional power attached to mental illness and sexuality. Thus, in the case of psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis in particular, Foucault sought to show that they (as fields of knowledge) owed more to strategic developments than epistemological discoveries. He writes, in *The History of Madness*, for instance:

---

197 “I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power... The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power/knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytic investment, of this domination-observation.” (*DP*, 305)
bref, lorsque le XIXe siècle, en inventant les fameuses ‘méthodes morales’ aura introduit la folie et sa guérison dans le jeu de la culpabilité. La distinction du physique et du moral n’est devenue un concept pratique dans la médecine de l’esprit qu’au moment où la problématique de la folie s’est déplacée vers une interrogation du sujet responsable. L’espace purement moral, qui est défini alors, donne les mesures exactes de cette intériorité psychologique où l’homme moderne cherche à la fois sa profondeur et sa vérité... La psychologie, comme moyen de guérir, s’organise désormais autour de la punition... Seule la pratique de la sanction a séparé chez le fou les médications du corps et celles de l’âme. Une médecine purement psychologique n’a été rendue possible que du jour où la folie s’est trouvée aliénée dans la culpabilité.” (HF, 411-412)

Generally speaking then, Foucault is attempting to demonstrate here that the objectifying practices of governance directly on the human body (which were discussed most explicitly in Discipline and Punish) are not the only means by which disciplinary power is mobilized. Rather, interpretive dialogues can themselves function as discipline through a subjectifying practice of power. The dialogues between psychiatrist and patient, priest and confessor, or social scientist and agent, are not merely disclosing some inner, hidden self that was not fully transparent to itself. Rather, they are productive of new forms of subjectivity more amenable to the governance of such ‘interpreting elites’. The modern self is constantly called forth to give an account of itself, to translate the hidden ‘unthought’—the “psychological interiority where modern men seek both their depth and their truth”—into discourse thus making it visible and amenable to governance. In telling the ‘hidden truth’ of ourselves, we aid the normalizing function of disciplinary power and self-imposed integration into prevailing institutional or discursive

198 “in short, the nineteenth century, through the invention of its notorious ‘moral methods’...brought madness and its cure into the domain of guilt. The distinction between the physical and the moral only became a practical concept in the medicine of minds when the problematics of madness were displaced towards the interrogation of a responsible subject. The purely moral space that was then defined measures exactly the psychological interiority where modern men seek both their depth and their truth... From then on, psychology, as a means of cure, was organized around the idea of punishment... Where the mad were concerned, only the practice of punishment separated the medicine of the body and the soul. A purely psychological medicine was only made possible when madness was alienated into guilt.” (HM, 325-326)
power fields. The agent learns through these dialogues to search for those hidden ‘inner’ truths, to correct her previous self-interpretation and replace it with a new account of ‘who she really is’, and in so doing, a new subjectivity is produced. As Dreyfus and Rabinow put it:

> At least in the West, even the most private self-examination is tied to powerful systems of external control: sciences and pseudosciences, religious and moral doctrines. The cultural desire to know the truth about oneself prompts the telling of truth; in confession after confession to oneself and to others, this *mise en discours* has placed the individual in a network of relations of power with those who claim to be able to extract the truth of these confessions through their possession of the keys to interpretation.199

What Dreyfus and Rabinow point to through their use of the term ‘interpretation’ in the passage above in a link not only between pastoral power and psychiatry, but between pastoral power and interpretive hermeneutics more generally. Thus, even if we avoid the traditional empiricist model (which attempts to ‘know’ humans through observation and explanation, as merely one object of study amongst all others), or the traditional rationalist one (in which knowledge is derived from deduction from true and necessary premises), the hermeneutic model (in which knowledge is acquired through interpretive dialogue between subjects) is not immune to the Foucaultian critique of the internal relationship between forms of knowledge and disciplinary power.

Whether Foucault has been fair in his characterization of these domains of knowledge and practice, or whether his claim regarding the interrelationship between them is a historically accurate picture is not something I intend to comment on. The point here is that Foucault understood hermeneutic philosophy to be a form of commentary derived from actual existing practices of governance that *constitute* a subject

---

who takes her ‘inner’ self to be the locus of truth about herself, something which is in need of extraction and interpretation by experts. Furthermore, from this standpoint, this general critique of hermeneutics, I submit, is applicable to Heidegger (particularly his early works) in as far as Heidegger self-consciously describes his work as a hermeneutic interpretation of Being which is ‘covered over’ by everyday understanding.

To summarize Foucault’s critique of hermeneutic philosophy (itself only one part of his general critique of Heideggerian philosophy), we can isolate and re-describe the three lines of analysis. First, Foucault argues that hermeneutics posits an excess of signification beyond the signifier which cannot, even in principle, itself be analyzed. The gap between what is *said* and what is *meant* can never be closed. Thus, hermeneutics perpetuates its task of interpretation at precisely the point where it can give no account of its own object of study—the ‘excess’ of meaning. Second, by claiming that meaning requires interpretation, hermeneutics is wedded to an intensification of interpretive techniques which drive ever ‘inward’ attempting to extract the hidden ‘truth’ of the subject. This hidden truth, Foucault suggests, is never merely ‘there’, but is rather constituted by the hermeneutic techniques themselves. Finally, hermeneutics masks the historical conditions of its emergence through institutions of pastoral power. From the Christian confessional, to psychoanalytic techniques, to the ‘better accounts’ of modern social science, hermeneutics is made possible only through a set of institutional developments explainable not by reference to the uncovering of great ‘truths’ about humanity, but rather to the demands of power in the development and exercise of those institutions.
III. Analytics of Finitude: The Unthought & ‘Original Man’

In Foucault’s breakthrough study of the 1960’s, The Order of Things, he added two different, but interlocking criticisms of hermeneutic philosophy in general and Heidegger in particular. The first revolves around the question of the ‘unthought’, and the second interrogates the role of the ‘origin’.

One of preoccupations of The Order of Things is marking the transition from the ‘Classical’ to the modern era in the emergence of language as a field of study. At the beginning of the 17th century, the relatively unproblematic resemblance of words and things (of which Foucault takes Don Quixote to be exemplary figure) begins to break down. Beginning with Bacon, but coming to full fruition with Descartes, unproblematic resemblance comes under attack. Indeed, assuming resemblance is itself taken to be a primary error:

Au début du XVIIe siècle, en cette période qu’à tort ou à raison on a appelée baroque, la pensée cesse de se mouvoir dans l’élément de la ressemblance. La similitude n’est plus la forme du savoir, mais plutôt l’occasion de l’erreur, le danger auquel on s’expose quand on n’examine pas le lieu mal éclairé des confusions. (MC, 101)

With Descartes, knowledge becomes a function of intuition and deduction—the capacity to see clearly and to arrange the parts of information together in the proper order (MC, 103-105; OT, 58-60). What is really important for Foucault, and what differentiates his account from most others of this time, is the transformation in the ground of signs and language that this permits. This modification, for Foucault (of this period in his writing),

---

200 “At the beginning of the seventeenth century, during the period that has been termed, rightly or wrongly, the Baroque, thought ceases to move in the element of resemblance. Similitude is no longer the form of knowledge but rather the occasion of error, the danger to which one exposes oneself when one does not examine the obscure region of confusions.” (OT, 56)
is more foundational to the general épistémè of the period than any particular theoretical picture generally held during the period—such as Mechanism (MC, 452; OT, 330). What is more important is that through the epistemological transformations of the period language is no longer taken to be something ‘within’ the world. Rather, it is system of human symbols which, if marshaled properly, can be used to organize and transmit clear thoughts about the world. The corollary of this claim about the foundation of the Classical épistémè is that the transition from it to the modern one will also be achieved not through a loosening of any particular theoretical picture, but rather through a general transformation in the system of signs and language that permit and organize inquiry into such ‘pictures’. This is why Foucault will locate the end of the Classical period, and beginning of the modern, with the “return of language” (MC, 452; OT, 330). This return, Foucault argued at the time, continued right up to his present and directly implicated the rise of hermeneutic philosophy in the nineteenth century (especially via Schleiermacher and Dilthey), but also Heideggerian philosophy in the twentieth. Foucault writes,

Le seuil du classicisme à la modernité... a été définitivement franchi lorsque les mot ont cessé de s’entrecroiser avec les représentations et de quadriller spontanément la connaissance des choses. Au début du XIXe siècle, ils ont retrouvé leur vieille, leur énigmatique épaisseur. (MC, 453)201

He then goes on to list the new ways in which language has existed “right up to our own day”, including a clear reference to hermeneutics: “si on veut interpréter, alors les mots deviennent texte à fracturer pour qu’on puisse voir émerger en pleine lumière cet autre sens qu’ils chacent.” (MC, 454)202 From the transformations of the nineteenth century,

201 “The threshold between Classicism and modernity... had been definitively crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they rediscovered their ancient, enigmatic density” (OT, 331).
202 “If one’s intent is to interpret, then words become a text to be broken down, so as to allow that other meaning hidden in them to emerge and become clearly visible.” (OT, 331)
particularly exemplified by Nietzsche and Mallarmé, “l’unité de la grammaire générale—
le discours—s’est dissipée, alors le langage est apparu selon des modes d’être multiples”
\((MC, 454)\)\(^{203}\). These transformations are the precondition for all our current
preoccupations with language as a discloser of being:

Il se pourrait bien que toutes les questions qui traversent actuellement notre
curiosité (Qu’est-ce que le langage? Qu’est-ce qu’un signe? Ce qui est muet dans
le monde, dans nos gestes, dans tout le blason énigmatique de nos conduites, dans
nos rêves et nos maladies—toute cela parle-t-il, et quel langage tient-il, selon
quelle grammaire? Tout est-il signifiant, ou quoi, et pour qui et selon quelles
règles? Quel rapport y a-t-il entre le langage et l’être, et est-ce bien à l’être que
toujours s’adresse, le langage, celui, du moins, qui parle vraiment? Qu’est-ce
donc que ce langage, qui ne dit rien, ne se tait jamais et s’appelle ‘littérature’?)—
it se pourrait bien que toutes ces questions se posent aujourd’hui dans la distance
jamais comblée entre la question de Nietzsche et la réponse que lui fit Malarmé.
\((MC, 456)\)\(^{204}\)

The most important transformation to come out of the positing of language as a discloser
of being, Foucault argues, is that this places ‘man’ at the centre of all knowledge, but
does so in a paradoxical manner. When “s’efface ce discours classique où l’être et la
représentation trouvaient leur lieu commun, alors, dans le mouvement profond d’une telle
mutation archéologique, l’homme apparaît avec sa position ambiguë d’objet pour un
savoir et de sujet qui connaît.” \((MC, 465)\)\(^{205}\) This, the famous ‘analytic of finitude’
charaterizing post-Kantian philosophy—through the nineteenth century to the present—is
comprised of three ‘doubles’ that constitutes ‘man’ in “sa position ambiguë d’objet pour

---

\(^{203}\) “the unity of general grammar—discourse—was broken up [and] language appeared in a multiplicity of
modes of being” \((OT, 332)\)

\(^{204}\) “It is quite possible that all those questions now confronting our curiosity (What is language? What is a
sign? What is unspoken in the world, in our gestures, in the whole enigmatic heraldry of our behaviour, our
dreams, our sicknesses—does all that speak, and if so in what language and in obedience to what grammar?
Is everything significant, and, if not, what is, and for whom, and in accordance with what rules? What
relation is there between language and being, and is it really to being that language is always addressed—at
least, language that speaks truly? What, then, is this language that says nothing, is never silent, and is
called ‘littérature’?)—it is quite possible that all these questions are presented today in the distance that was
never crossed between Nietzsche’s question and Mallarmé’s reply.” \((OT, 333)\)

\(^{205}\) “Classical discourse, in which being and representation found their common locus, is eclipsed, then, in
the profound upheaval of such an archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as an
object of knowledge and as a subject that knows” \((OT, 340)\)
un savoir et de sujet qui connaît”. They are (1) the transcendental and the empirical, (2) the cognito and the unthought, and (3) the retreat and the return of the origin. The first of these is a characterization of Kant and critical rationalism and does not directly implicate Heidegger. The last two, however, do.

III.A. The Unthought

Foucault opens Chapter 9, section V— the ‘cogito’ and the unthought—with the following claims:

Se l’homme est bien, dans le monde, le lieu d’un redoublement empirico-transcendantal, s’il doit être cette figure paradoxe où les contenus empiriques de la connaissance délivrent, mais à partir de soi, les conditions qui les ont rendus possibles, l’homme ne peut pas se donner dans la transparence immédiate et souveraine d’un cogito... L’homme est un mode d’être tel qu’en lui se fonde cette dimension... qui va, d’une part de lui-même qu’il ne réfléchit pas dans un cogito à l’acte de pensé par quoi il la ressaisit; et qui, inversement, va de cette pure saisie à l’encombrement empirique, à la montée désordonné des contenus, au surplomb des expériences qui échappent à elles-mêmes, à tout l’horizon silencieux de ce qui se donne dans l’étendue sablonneuse de la non-pensée... C’est la raison pour laquelle la réflexion transcendante, sous sa forme moderne, ne trouve pas le point de sa nécessité, comme chez Kant, dans l’existence d’une science de la nature... mais dans l’existence muette, prête pourtant à parler et comme toute traversée secrètement d’un discours virtuel, de ce non-connu à partir duquel l’homme est sans cesse appelé à la connaissance de soi. (MC, 479-480)

Elsewhere, he elaborates on this, adding:

Dans le cogito moderne, il s’agit au contraire de laisser valoir selon sa plus grande dimension la distance qui à la fois sépare et relie la pensée présente à soi, et ce

206 “If man is indeed, in the world, the locus of an empirico-transcendental double, if he is that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible, then man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a cogito... Man is a mode of being which accommodates that dimension... which extends from a part of himself not reflected in the cogito to the act of thought by which he apprehends that part; and which, in the inverse direction, extends from that pure apprehension to the empirical clutter, the chaotic accumulation of contents, the weight of experiences constantly eluding themselves, the whole silent horizon of what is posited in the sandy stretches of non-thought... This is why transcendental reflection in its modern form does not, as in Kant, find its fundamental necessity in the existence of a science of nature... but in the existence—mute, yet ready to speak, and secretly impregnated with a potential discourse—of that not-known from which man is perpetually summoned towards self-knowledge.” (OT, 351-352)
who, from the thought, s’entrenches in the non-thought; it is (and this is why it is not so much a discovery of an evident truth as a ceaseless task constantly to be undertaken afresh) to pursue, reduplicate and reactivate in an explicit form the articulation of thought in what is in it, around it, below it which is not thought, yet which is not foreign to thought, in the sense of an irreducible, an insuperable exteriority. In this form, the cogito will not therefore be the sudden and illuminating discovery that all thought is thought, but the constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside elsewhere than here, and yet so very close to itself; how it can be in the forms of non-thinking. The modern cogito does not reduce the whole being of things to thought without ramifying the being of thought down to the inert network of what does not think.” (OT, 353)
l’interrogation sur le mode d’être de l’homme et sur son rapport à l’impensé. (MC, 483-484)²⁰⁸

Immediately following this, in a passage that can be read as a mode of auto-critique of his own early appropriation of phenomenological categories in his studies of psychology and madness, Foucault writes that “mème si [la phénoménologie] s’est esquissée d’abord à travers l’antipsychologisme... elle a fait resurgir le problème de l’a priori et le motif transcendantal.” Making the link back to Heidegger most explicitly, this explains why for Foucault, phenomenology “a toujours été conduite à des questions, à la question ontologique”, despite being “s’inaugurant par une réduction au cogito.” Concluding, he chastizes this movement:

Sous nos yeux, le projet phénoménologique ne cesse de se dénouer en une description du vécu, qui est empirique malgré elle, et une ontologie de l’impensé qui met hors circuit la primauté du ‘Je pense’. (MC, 484)²⁰⁹

So, to trace the logic of Foucault’s critique, we might proceed as follows.

Beginning at least with Kant, modern European philosophy has been preoccupied with the paradoxical role of ‘man’ as both the product of historical forces (language, culture, economics, politics, etc.) and also the subject which investigations into those forces. If

²⁰⁸ “It may seem that phenomenology has effected a union between the Cartesian theme of the cogito and the transcendental motif that Kant had derived from Hume’s critique; according to this view, Husserl has revived the deepest vocation of the Western ratio, bending it back upon itself in a reflection which is a radicalization of pure philosophy and a basis for the possibility of its own history. In fact, Husserl was able to effect this union only in so far as transcendental analysis had changed its point of application... and in so far as the cogito had modified its function (which is no longer to lead to an apodictic existence, starting from a thought that affirms itself wherever it thinks, but to show how thought can elude itself and thus lead to a many-sided and proliferating interrogation concerning being). Phenomenology is therefore much less the resumption of an old rational goal of the West than the sensitive and precisely formulated acknowledgement of the great hiatus that occurred in the modern episteme at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If phenomenology has any allegiance... it is to interrogation concerning man’s mode of being and his relation to the unthought.” (OT, 354)

²⁰⁹ Translations for quotes in this paragraph: “even though [phenomenology] was first suggested by way of anti-psychologism... it revived the problem of the a priori and the transcendental motif”; “has always been led to questions, to the question of ontology”; “inaugurated by a reduction to the cogito”; “The phenomenological project continually resolves itself, before our eyes, into a description—empirical despite itself—of actual experience, and into an ontology of the unthought that automatically short-circuits the primacy of the ‘I think’.” (OT, 354-355)
we are the product of historical forces, and this is the presupposition for our social sciences, then we must assume that knowledge of these forces is itself structured by those same forces. Our knowledge of ourselves is, therefore, dependent on our knowledge of the forces, of history. So we develop the human sciences to try and ‘carve out’ specific domains of knowledge by which we can slowly piece together the empirical evidence for how specifically the historical forces at play affect ‘man’. Taken together these ‘forces’ (linguistic, cultural, social, etc.) are the ‘background field’ for the subject to appear. They are, however, not knowable to the subject in its historical context. Hence, they constitute what Foucault is calling here ‘the unthought’. They would only be knowable to something—some subject—which could, through proper methodology, sheer force of will or the like, stand outside these historical forces long enough to know them.

Whatever this capacity is, will be the transcendental subject—the condition of possibility for self-knowledge (and, we shall see, for freedom, since it is on the basis of this self-knowledge that self-governed action can proceed). Foucault seems to be saying that Heidegger placed his existential phenomenology at the end of this struggle. Heidegger thought that he had overcome this problematic by making Dasein a thoroughly historical being. However, because the condition for Dasein’s knowledge of this historicality was a mode of interpretation called hermeneutics, which permitted Dasein to transcend ‘everyday understanding’ and achieve (albeit only momentarily) a glimpse of fundamental ontology, it still retains the transcendental-empirical bifurcation of ‘man’. In his role as hermeneutic interpreter, ‘man’ can interpret the ‘unthought’ theories and beliefs of the background, make them explicit and thereby close the gap between the
empirical and the transcendental self. This makes Heidegger’s project only one more in a
long line, from Kant to Hegel, Schopenhauer, Marx and Husserl, in whom,

... (MC, 486)

The only way for modern thought to close this gap, between the transcendental and the
empirical subject, is to “work backwards—or downwards”: to painstakingly reconstruct
the historical conditions which produced the subject in the first place, thereby stripping
the layers of historical forces away to reveal the ‘original man’ beneath it all.

III.B. Original Man

In the third and final ‘double’ constituting the analytic of finitude in modern
thought for Foucault, we are presented with the paradoxical role of origins, beginning
with a comment on the eighteenth century. Foucault notes that during this ‘classical age’,
European thought was overly preoccupied with a return to origins: in economics, natural
history and linguistics in particular. It was hoped that if we could locate the original state
of nature behind or beneath our historically altered practices, a vision of ‘original’ or
‘authentic’ man would emerge that could be used as a critical tool over against existing
practices. ‘Original man’ serves then both as a touchstone for the true, as a regulative or

---

210 “in every case, the inexhaustible double that presents itself to reflection as the blurred projection of
what man is in his truth, but that also plays the role of a preliminary ground upon which man must collect
himself and recall himself in order to attain his truth. For though this double may be close, it is alien, and
the role, the true undertaking, of thought will be to bring it as close to itself as possible; the whole of
modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought” (OT, 356)
corrective tool for the present, and as an interpretive key for unlocking the teleological purposiveness of history. We can observe the slow gathering of these various roles in the development and deployment of ‘state of nature’ theories throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The multiple roles the ‘original man’ played in work throughout the Classical Age means that distinctions between empirical and normative claims are hard to impose upon it. As Foucault notes,

Peu importait que cette naissance fût considérée comme fictive ou réelle, qu’elle ait eu valeur d’hypothèse explicative ou d’événement historique: à dire vrai ces distinctions n’existent que pour nous. (MC, 489)

In the transition from Classical to modern thought (roughly transitioning in the early eighteenth century) this origin became an impossibility. Since the fields of study themselves (economics, natural history and language) came to be seen as constituted by historicity, a point outside of history for their beginnings was “n’est plus concevable.” (MC, 490) This produced a kind of crisis within such sciences. The need for an ahistorical touchstone was still there—something that could serve the function of grounding the truth of the field as a proper field of study, the corrective function for ethics, and the interpretive function for history. However, since the investigators came to see themselves as within the historicity itself, such an origin, if it did exist, could never be articulated by them. Such sciences, then,

ne pouvaient donc jamais énoncer véritablement leur origine, bien que toute leur histoire soit, de l’intérieur, comme pointée vers elle. Ce n’est plus l’origine qui donne lieu à l’historicité; c’est l’historicité qui dans sa trame même laisse se

211 Key to my argument in the final section of this work will be the claim that the function of the ‘original man’ as foundation, corrective tool and interpretive key is taken over by the transcendental subject in Kant.

212 “It was of little importance whether this origin was considered fictitious or real, whether it possessed the value of an explanatory hypothesis or a historical event: in fact, these distinctions exist only for us” (OT, 359).

213 “no longer conceivable” (OT, 359)
profiler la nécessité d’une origine qui lui serait à la fois interne et étrangère. (MC, 490)\textsuperscript{214}

The knowing subject of such sciences of man would never be “contemporain de cette origine qui à travers le temps des choses s’esquisse en se dérobant.” (MC, 490)\textsuperscript{215} This has the effect of opening up a gap between ‘modern man’ and himself. ‘Modern man’ is a knowing subject, but the conditions of this knowledge are an historical inheritance prior to, other than, and ultimately inaccessible to him in his original state since he always stands within their wake, affected by them. In other words, “C’est toujours sur un fond de déjà commencé que l’homme peut penser ce qui vaut pour lui comme origine.” (MC, 491)\textsuperscript{216} This has two consequences. First, “l’origine des choses est toujours reculée”, and second, “elle signifie d’autre part que l’homme... est l’être sans origine... celui dont la naissance n’est jamais accessible parce que jamais elle n’a eu ‘lieu’.” (MC, 493)\textsuperscript{217}

In one of the few places where Foucault references Heidegger by name, he specifically includes him in this problematic of origins. Foucault indicates that at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth a novel attempt to solve this problem was developed. The new task was to find the ground of time itself in the hopes that if we could demonstrate how the experience of temporality conditioned experience, then time would be prior to history. If ‘modern man’ could not have a history except because he always already had experiences conditioned by temporality (i.e., if

---

\textsuperscript{214} “Could never, therefore, truly express their origin, even though, from the inside, their whole history is, as it were, directed towards it. It is no longer origin that gives rise to historicity; it is historicity that, in its very fabric, makes possible the necessity of an origin which must be both internal and foreign to it.” (OT, 359)

\textsuperscript{215} “contemporaneous with that origin which is outlined through the time of things even as it eludes the gaze” (OT, 359)

\textsuperscript{216} “It is always against a background of the already begun that man is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origins.” (OT, 360).

\textsuperscript{217} “the origin of things is always pushed further back”, and; “it signifies that man... is the being without origin... whose birth is never accessible because it never took ‘place’.” (OT, 361)
temporality was an existential), then this notion of time could serve the function of a bridge back to our origins—not conceived of historically, but as ‘authenticity’. Foucault writes,

Une tâche se donne alors à la pensée: celle de contester l’origine des choses, mais de la contester pour la fonder, en retrouvant le mode sur lequel se constitue la possibilité du temps,-- cette origine sans origine ni commencement à partir de quoi tout peut prendre naissance. (MC, 493)

This struggle to locate the experience of time outside and prior to history, has been “depuis le XIXe siècle, sont nées toutes les tentatives pour ressaisir ce que pouvaient être dans l’ordre humain, le commencement et le recommencement, l’éloignement et la présence du début, le retour et la fin.” (MC, 494) Foucault concludes by placing Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Heidegger as “only” at the point of

l’extrême recul de l’origine—là où les dieux se sont détournés, où le désert croît, où la techne a installé la domination de sa volonté; de sorte qu’il ne s’agit point là d’un achèvement ni d’une courbe, mais plutôt de cette déchirure incessante qui délivre l’origine dans la mesure même de son retrait; l’extrême est alors le plus proche. (MC, 496)

In the context of our discussion of Heidegger, then, we can see that Focault does not take the project of Being and Time to be an exception to the general problematic. Rather, it is merely an extension and modification of the larger problematic. This undermines Heidegger’s whole project of a critical reconstruction of the history of Being. It also takes Heidegger’s claim (particularly explicitly in Division II of Being and Time) to have

---

218 “A task is thereby set for thought: that of contesting the origin of things, but of contesting it in order to give it a foundation, by rediscovering the mode upon which the possibility of time is constituted—that origin without origin or beginning, on the basis of which everything is able to come into being.” (OT, 362)
219 “since the nineteenth century... the starting point of all our attempts to re-apprehend what beginning and re-beginning, the recession and the presence of the beginning, the return and the end, could be in the human sphere.” (OT, 362-3)
220 “extreme recession of the origin—in that region where the gods have turned away, where the desert is increasing, where the techne has established the dominion of its will; so that what we are concerned with here is neither a completion nor a curve, but rather that ceaseless rending open which frees the origin in exactly that degree to which it recedes; the extreme is therefore what is nearest. (OT, 364)
found in our experience of temporality an originary, primordial ground for historicality
and to have located it historically. As Timothy Rayner states,

By locating the experience of the event of being within modernity, Foucault undermines the transcendental logic of Heidegger’s history of being and strips Heideggerian thought of its originary status. Far from a matter of re-engaging the truth of being, founded and forgotten by the Greeks, Heidegger’s effort to recover the origin of man in the vicissitudes of the withdrawn event is simply a sophisticated attempt to resolve the aporias of the modern episteme.\textsuperscript{221}

IV. Conclusions

The preceding chapter was devoted to an explication of Foucault’s explicit and implicit criticism of Heidegger and Heideggerian philosophy. In presenting an overview of ‘Foucault’s critique of Heidegger’ we risk, of course, imposing too much order and structure upon Foucault’s critique. It should be kept in mind, therefore, that this is my reconstruction—that Foucault himself did not attempt to present any systematic evaluation of Heidegger’s philosophy and that the criticisms that did emerge in his work, did so over a long period of time, through multiple stages of his own work and are not only inconsistent but are even, at times, contradictory. In particular, we have seen in the transition from early studies of madness and psychiatry, to archaeologies of knowledge, through to the genealogies of power/knowledge that Foucault moved from a relatively sympathetic position, to one that was more incommensurable with Heidegger. It should also be noted that many of the criticisms outlined above were presented as criticisms of broad philosophical movements, such as existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology—movements to which Heidegger was no doubt a main contributor, but which nevertheless cannot be collapse into merely one thinker. At best, we can say that

\textsuperscript{221} Rayner, p. 428
Heidegger may have been exemplary of the general problems Foucault found with these traditions of thought generally. These problems may be summarized thusly:

(1) Heidegger’s fundamental ontology is arrived at in the first instance from a phenomenology of existential experiences (such as Angst) whose historical conditions of possibility are not themselves given investigation. Foucault’s *historical* ontology of the singularity of our forms of experience cuts against this reliance.

(2) The ‘existential experience’ as given (above) is not complete and self-transparent. That is to say, it requires *Interpretation* in order for the subject to explore its existential significance. This produces three hermeneutic problems for Foucault: (a) the ‘excess’ of the signified produces an inexorable interpretive task, which (b) produces imperatives of intensification of interpretive techniques which, in turn, (c) mask the embeddedness of hermeneutics in institutions of pastoral power.

(3) The imperative to raise ‘everyday’ understanding to the level of fundamental ontology is resolved through a reconstruction of the history of Being, tracing backward to the point of total transparency and unity of the subject. This, for Foucault, firmly places Heidegger within the ‘analytics of finitude’ characteristic of modern thought, reliant as it is upon the *cognito*- unthought distinction, as well as the retreat and return of the origin.

The case for any kind of effective or constructive dialogue between Heidegger and Foucault seems foreclosed at this point. However, I think that setting up the points of
divergence between the two philosophers is important for understanding the final section of this thesis. In the chapters that follow I intend to show not only that Foucault returned to certain Heideggerian themes, but also that when we re-read Heidegger via Foucault’s late works, we are better positioned to develop a full account of situated freedom than if we had taken up only one thinker or the other.
Fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers, in whom they can be discounted. In the work of great authors they can lead into the very centre of their work and are the most important clue to a true understanding of their problems and new insights. – Hannah Arendt

It has often been noted that in the eight year gap between the publication of volume I of *The History of Sexuality* (*La Volonté de Savoir*, 1976) and volumes II and III (*L’Usage des Plaisirs* and *Le Souci de Soi*), an important shift occurred in Foucault’s thinking. Commentators almost universally agree that this period inaugurated some form of ‘auto-critique’, as well as ushering in a new research agenda. What is less clear, however, is precisely the significance and extent of this change. Some insist that this period saw Foucault make a fundamental break with his previous work, while others insist on continuity and modification merely in emphasis. It is also worth noting that the question regarding the extent of this movement has implications for substantive issues. For instance, those who emphasize a large break are subsequently forced to choose ‘which Foucault’ had the proper analysis—some opting for the earlier emphasis on power and tactical resistance, while others prefer the supposed emphasis on autonomy and aesthetic self-fashioning in the later works.

---

223 In Foucault’s own words: “Since I started this last type of project [a genealogy of the subject] I had to change my mind on several important points. Let me introduce a kind of autocritique.” (*RC*, 161)
224 For instance, Judith Butler’s notion of performativity appears to owe a considerable debt to a reading of Foucault along these lines. She defines ‘performativity’ as “a reiteration of a norm or set of norms... [that] conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” and states that her work “accepts as a point of departure Foucault’s notion that regulatory power produces the subject it controls, that power is not
Rather than attempt to intervene in such debates directly, my specific aim here is to help us think about freedom in relation to questions of ontology—that is, in relation to the question of how it is that a ‘world’ of entities appears before us at all. This will involve, therefore, a selective reading of Foucault, one that attempts to draw out conclusions that Foucault himself did not make explicit, nor perhaps would have agreed to himself (just as with my reading of Heidegger in the previous chapters). It is not my primary interest to establish an authoritative reading of Foucault that will resolve exegetical problems, but rather to suggest that Foucault is an important—even indispensable—resource for thinking about freedom in ontological terms. This involves examining freedom in terms other than as reducible to a property of the subject, or by reference to the relatively abstract forces of a historical teleology (idealist or materialist). The goal is to think about freedom as both a condition and feature of those activities by which a ‘world’ is disclosed to us, by which a horizon of intelligibility is made manifest and by which it nevertheless remains open to modification and change. My claim is that, in his late works, Foucault provides us with the richest vocabulary we have to date for thinking about freedom and historical ontology.

This vocabulary is not, however, without its ambiguities, difficulties, and reversals. Thus, this chapter proceeds in two parts. Part one is organized around Foucault’s equivocation in his use of the terms ‘conduct’, ‘thought’ and ‘experience’ from roughly 1977 to 1982. These three concepts, I argue, together comprise the locus of a new

---

only imposed externally, but works as the regulatory and normative means by which subjects are formed.” Bodies that Matter (NY & London: Routledge, 1993), p.12, 22.

questioning out of which comes Foucault’s final position. This final position, read in part two of the chapter, is organized around the following question: How can one think ‘freedom’ in relation to historical ontology? My hypothesis is that while ‘thought’ remains a central concept in Foucault’s understanding of freedom (indicating a possible return to subject-centered accounts of freedom as self-reflection), Foucault’s understanding of thought is that it presupposes activities of ‘care’ which are themselves the ontological ground of freedom. My reconstruction of Foucault in relation to this question moves through three stages of his analysis. The first stage examines the principle of contingent eventalization: the notion that a given domain of experience is always susceptible to a ‘breach of self-evidence’, the event of which provides the ontological basis for freedom, defined as the possibility of thinking and acting otherwise than given. The second stage relies upon what can be called the principle of the irreducibility of thought, in which an ‘event’ provides the occasion for reflection upon the historical conditions of possibility—the historical a priori—of a given problematical form of experience. Here is where Foucault placed most emphasis on individual self-reflexivity and self-objectification. Third and finally however, Foucault comes to the position that freedom is to be understood as grounded neither in the contingent ‘event’, nor in thought-as-problematization, but rather in ethical-spiritual transformation. This ethical-spiritual transformation places emphasis not on individual self-reflection, but on care within relational activities. The reading of Foucault I offer looks to this mode of being within activities as the heart of freedom. I argue that Foucault’s most important insights relate not to either heroic rupture-events, nor the thinking of historical a priori, but rather to spiritual activities by which a gathering together of the acquisition of
knowledge, the disclosure of entities and the ethical transformation of the self in one
moment is effected. This final position, I argue, most closely realizes the Heideggerian
notion of freedom as a careful engagement with the disclosure of being and provides the
basis for a *history* of the practices of attunement to which Heidegger only tangentially
refers. In other words, it provides an opening for the combining of Foucault’s historical
modes of critical inquiry with Heidegger’s ontological investigations.

**I: Three Equivocations**

**I.A. The Model of War**

In order to understand his ‘auto-critique’ and what I am calling here the ‘three
equivocations’, it is important to first establish that against which the critique is working.
This earlier position might be referred to as the ‘war-model’.

Foucault described *Surveiller et punir* as a history of the ‘micro-physics of power’
which would also serve as a genealogy of the modern soul. His aim was to bring to light
a perspective on the interiorized self, or soul, that would see it not as “les rests réactivés
d’une idéologie,” but rather as “le corrélatif actuel d’une certaine technologie du pouvoir
sur le corps” (*SP*, 38) In other words, Foucault sought to extend his critique of
historical hermeneutics (presented in the previous chapter) by demonstrating that the
ideological formulations of a particular age—the ideas, concepts and cultural
manifestations—were mere effects of what he called the political technology of the
body, defined by the micro techniques applied to the body on a regular and carefully
regulated basis that, over time, produced new forms of subjectivity in the West. In

---

226 “the reactivated remnants of an ideology”; “the present correlative of a certain technology of power
over the body.” (*DP*, 29)
describing the kind of power needed for such a political technology of the body—

disciplinary power—Foucault writes,

le pouvoir qui s’y exerce ne soit pas conçu comme une propriété, mais comme une stratégie... on lui donne pour modèle la bataille perpétuelle plutôt que le contrat qui opère une cession ou la conquête qui s’empare d’un domaine. Il faut en somme admettre que ce pouvoir s’exerce plutôt qu’il ne se possède, qu’il n’est pas le ‘privilège’ acquis ou conservé de la classe dominante, mais l’effet d’ensemble de ses positions stratégiques—effet que manifeste et parfois reconduit la position de ceux qui sont dominés. (SP, 35)\(^{227}\)

Using this model of ‘perpetual battle’\(^{228}\), Foucault also sought to demonstrate that a history of the present could be written without resorting to a philosophy of the constituting subject.\(^{229}\) In other words, a new form of political and social organization (such as disciplinary society) could be brought into existence without anyone in particular devising to do so. Rather, the new regime of knowledge/power could emerge as the regularized, overall effect of a set of strategic positions originally devised for specific, localized purposes. As he put it in a 1978 talk,

---

\(^{227}\) “the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy... one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated.” (DP, 26-27)

\(^{228}\) That Foucault saw the metaphor of war as central to the whole of Discipline and Punish is evidenced by the concluding lines: “Dans cette humanité centrale et centralisée, effet et instrument de relations de pouvoir complexes, corps et forces assujettis par des dispositifs d’ ‘incarcération’ multiples, objets pour des discours qui sont eux-même des éléments de cette stratégie, il faut entendre le grondement de la bataille.” (SP, 360) “In this central and centralized humanity, the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces subjected by multiple mechanisms of ‘incarceration’, objects for discourses that are in themselves elements for this strategy, we must hear the distant roar of battle.” (DP, 308)

We might also look to the 1976 interview, ‘Truth and power’ in which Foucault says, “one’s point of reference should not be to the great model of language [langue] and signs but, rather, to that of war and battle. The history that bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language—relations of power, not relations of meaning.” (EW3, 116)

\(^{229}\) In ‘Truth and power’, Foucault describes his aim “to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis that 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 that can account for the constitutions of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject that is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.” (EW3, 118)
La ‘discipline’ n’est pas l’expression d’un ‘type idéal’ (celui de l’homme discipliné’); elle est la généralisation et la mise en connexion de techniques différentes qui elle-mêmes ont à répondre à des objectifs locaux (apprentissage scolaire, formation de troupes capables de manier le fusil)... en fait des stratégies différentes venaient s’opposer, se composer, se superposer et produire des effets permanents et solides qu’on pourrait parfaitement comprendre dans leur rationalité même, bien qu’ils ne soient pas conformes à la programmation première: c’est cela la solidité et la souplesse du dispositif. (DE2, 847)

This also meant, however, that strategic resistance against such localized exercises of power could feed into the overall regime. The struggle to reverse or overthrow this or that particular practice exercised against oneself could facilitate the stabilizing of an overall regime of power. Resistance was internal to the constitution of a regime of knowledge/power and could not be read as merely in opposition to it. This resistance simultaneously reinforced power relations and undermined them, precisely because ‘resistance’ is not a singular thing, but rather a set of conflicting and contradictory acts

---

230 “‘Discipline’ isn’t the expression of an ‘ideal type’ (that of ‘disciplined man’); it’s the generalization and interconnection of different techniques themselves designed in response to localized requirements (schooling, training troops to handle rifles)... in fact there are different strategies that are mutually opposed, composed, and superposed so as to produce permanent and solid effects that can perfectly well be understood in terms of their rationality, even though they don’t conform to the initial programming: this is what gives the resulting apparatus its solidity and suppleness.” (EW3, 231-2)

231 A classic example of this from Foucault’s work is sexuality. Along with changes in nationalism, capitalism and imperialism in early modern European governance, the emergence of ‘biopolitics’ saw an increased preoccupation with how to raise and maintain a large, healthy population from which one could select excellent soldiers, labourers and the like. This lead to the proliferation of a host of political technologies of governance, such as population surveys, birth-control methods, infant mortality studies, etc. In their inception, these practices were really localized, targeted strategies with specific aims. However, into the 18th and 19th centuries, “la notion de ‘sexe’ a permis de regrouper selon une unité artificielle des éléments anatomiques, des fonctions biologiques, des conduites, des sensations, des plaisirs et elle a permis de faire fonctionner cette unité fictive comme principle causal” (VS, 204) [“the notion of ‘sex’ made it possible to group together, in an artificial unity, anatomical elements, biological functions, conduct, sensations, and pleasures, and it enabled one to make use of this fictitious unity as a causal principle” (HSI, 154:)]. ‘Sexuality’, as a central feature of subjectivity and identity, only becomes possible once this transformation has occurred. Now, within this general domain, there has always been a hierarchical ordering of various kinds of sexuality and a differential governance in relation to this ordering. Those marked as ‘homosexuals’ have, for instance, resisted their differential status within the general typology. What Foucault warns us of, however, is that this resistance—insofar as it is a kind of tactical reversal of specific strategies of governance deployed against homosexuals (say, the struggle to decriminalize sex between men)—can simultaneously reinforce the general regime of power (i.e., ‘sexuality’ itself) since the general regime depends centrally on the close association of subjectivity and sex-desire (whether it is deployed ‘for’ or ‘against’ any particular, localized governance practice).
exercised by subjects against and in relation to the particular power practices exercised upon them. Because power relations in a given era are not “univoques,” they définissent des points innombrables d’affrontement, des foyers d’instabilité dont chacun comporte ses risques de conflit, de luttes, et d’inversion au moins transitoire des rapports de forces. Le renversement de ces ‘micropouvoirs’ n’obéit donc pas à la loi du tout ou rien; il n’est pas acquis une fois pour toutes par un nouveau contrôle des appareils ni par un nouveau fonctionnement ou une destruction des institutions; en revanche aucun de ses épisodes localisés ne peut s’inscrire dans l’histoire sinon par les effets qu’il induit sur tout le réseau où il est pris. (SP, 35-6)  

So, we can see that there is some room for resistance in this war-model, and that through a study of this strategic battle, Foucault can account for historical change. What is less clear, however, is whether the mere fact of historical change can be spoken of in terms of ‘freedom’. From the standpoint of traditional Western political philosophy, at least this would appear to be a peculiar formulation of freedom, inasmuch as change here is more the effect of practices of power on subjects, rather than the agency of subjects against such practices. In this formulation, there appears to be no ‘remainder’ to power relations which locates the site from which freedom makes a counter-attack. Rather, because power relations themselves are multifold and internally contradictory, simply by exercising them subjects create spaces for change and even strategic reversal. Foucault is quite clear that “ce n’est pas l’activité du sujet de connaissance qui produirait un savoir,  

---

232 “define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations. The over throw of these ‘micro-powers’ does not, then obey the law of all or nothing; it is not acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions; on the other hand, none of its localized episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up.” (DP, 27)  

utile ou rétif au pouvoir.” Rather, it is the regime of power/knowledge itself that “déterminent les formes et les domaines possibles de la connaissance.” (SP, 36)234

In this model of war then, ‘freedom’ refers neither to a state of being or property of the constituting subject, nor does it refer to a particular kind of creative activity whereby new ways of thinking and acting are brought into being. Rather, insofar as there is any freedom within this model it is merely the contingent effects produced by the operationalization of power on bodies or perhaps the stubborn remainder of a quasi-materialist claim about bodies as ‘resistant material’, never fully compliant to power.235

I.B. The Arts of Government, Governmentality and Conduct

The war-model, heavily influenced by Nietzsche, still conceived of power as a relatively impersonal set of forces to which one is subject (i.e., practices of governance on subjects). ‘Freedom’ in this model is thus largely conceived of as a tactical reversal of certain specific power relations on oneself. Despite what Foucault often implied, this form of freedom is still largely reactionary. In other words, it would be hard to connect this understanding of freedom to ‘the engagement with beings as such’ since Foucault rarely discusses it as participatory; rather, it is resistant. Furthermore, it turns out that this capacity for tactical reversal or resistance is itself another manifestation of power. As an example, we might think here of two billiard balls shot at each other. Upon collision the trajectory of both is changed in perhaps unpredictable ways. Yet it would be hard to say

234 “it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power”; “determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.” (DP, 28)
235 This appears to be Colin Gordon’s reading. He writes, that “the facts of resistance are nevertheless assigned an irreducible role within [Foucault’s] analysis. The field of strategies is a field of conflicts: the human material operated on by programmes and technologies is inherently a resistant material. If this were not the case, history itself would become unthinkable.” ‘Afterword,’ in M. Foucault, Power/Knowledge (NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), p.255. Unfortunately, Gordon never explains the existence of this ‘resistant material’ or how precisely it escapes power.
that the billiard balls are ‘free’ since the movement of each is merely the product of the set of forces to which it is subject.

Even during the Collège de France lectures of 1977-78 (Securité, Territoire, Population), however, Foucault began to show some equivocation in his analysis of power and governmentality presented in Discipline and Punish and volume I of The History of Sexuality, leading to his use of the term ‘conduct’. This equivocation, the resulting new lines of inquiry opened up by it, and the connection to Foucault’s important later text, ‘The subject and power’, are exemplified by his remarks on the translation of oikonomia psuchôn, a phrase used by early Christian ministers to describe the pastorate.

The discussion of ‘conduct’ and the oikonomia psuchôn follows on the heels of the first precise definition of ‘governmentality’ Foucault provides. He states that, in using this term, he means three things:

Par ‘gouvernamentalité’, j’entends l’ensemble constitué par les institutions, les procédures, analyses et réflexions, les calculs et les tactiques qui permettent d’exercer cette forme bien spécifique, quoique très complexe, de pouvoir qui a pour cible principe la population, pour forme majeure de savoir l’économie politique, pour instrument technique essentiel les dispositifs de sécurité. Deuxièmement, par ‘gouvernamentalité’, j’entends la tendance, la linge de force qui, dans tout l’Occident, n’a pas cessé de conduire, et depuis fort longtemps, vers la prééminence de ce type de pouvoir qu’on peut appeler le ‘gouvernement’ sur tous les autres: souveraineté, discipline, et qui a amené, d’une part, le développement de toute une série a’appareils spécifiques de gouvernement [et, d’autre part], le développement de toute une série de savoirs. Enfine, par ‘gouvernamentalité’, je crois qu’il faudrait entendre le processus, ou plutôt le résultat de processus par lequel ‘État de justice du Moyen Âge, devenu aux XVe et XVIe siècles État administratif, s’est trouvé petit à petit ‘gouvernementalisé’. (STP, 111-112)

236 James Miller notes the shift that took place during these lectures, but perhaps overstates the case when he writes “Foucault begins predictably, by talking about security and bio-politics. But then, abruptly—shortly after the course had started, his associate recalls—‘he stopped. He could not go on. And it was clear that this problematic, of bio-politics, was over for him – it was finished. His approach changed. But he still didn’t know where he was going.” James Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p.299.

237 “First, by ‘gouvernamentalité’ I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of
We can observe the gathering together and specifying of two shifts in Foucault’s thought in this passage, one theoretical, the other historical. The theoretical shift is the precise differentiation between ‘the arts of government’ and ‘governmentality’. From roughly 1975 to 1977 (incorporating works from *Les Anormaux*, *Il faut défendre la société*, *Surveiller et punir*, and *La Volonté de savoir*, volume I of *Histoire de la sexualité*)

Foucault was primarily concerned with what he called ‘the arts of government’. As defined in *Les Anormaux* in 1975, the ‘arts of government’ were a specific set of political technologies developed in the Classical Age (beginning in the 18th century) whereby the power of the sovereign was no longer manifest through exclusion, execution or incarceration\(^{238}\), but rather through

\[ \text{l’invention des technologies positives de pouvoir...une réaction d’inclusion, d’observation, de formation de savoir, de multiplication des effets de pouvoir à partir du cumul de l’observation et du savoir. On est passé d’une technologie du pouvoir qui chasse, qui exclut, qui bannit, qui marginalise, qui réprime, à un pouvoir qui est enfin un pouvoir positif, un pouvoir que fabrique, un pouvoir qui observe, un pouvoir qui sait et un pouvoir qui se multiple à partir de ses propres effets. (4, 44)}^{239} \]

The Classical Age sees the birth of ‘government’ in the modern sense of the term, by which Foucault means three things: (1) “une théorie juridico-politique du pouvoir, qui est security as its essential technical instrument. Second, by ‘governmentality’ I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power—sovereignty, discipline, and so on—of the type of power that we can call ‘government’ and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (*savoirs*). Finally, by ‘governmentality’ I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually ‘governmentalized.’” (*STP*, 108)

\(^{238}\) Which, Foucault claims, continue on in the Classical Age but not under the guise of ‘governance’, but rather under that of security (*STP*, 7-9).

\(^{239}\) “the invention of positive technologies of power... a reaction of inclusion, observation, the formation of knowledge, the multiplication of effects of power on the basis of the accumulation of observations and knowledge. We pass from a technology of power that drives out, excludes, banishes, marginalizes, and represses, to a fundamentally positive power that fashions, observes, knows, and multiplies itself on the basis of its own effects.” (4, 48)
Now, in the passage quoted above in which Foucault first differentiates ‘governmentality’ from ‘governance’, we can observe a theoretical shift away from a study of the first two aspects of ‘the arts of government’ (the positive technologies of power and the state apparatus) towards the last (‘the general technique of the exercise of power’). This involves making an analytic distinction between the operations of power within specific (in this case, state) institutions and the technique or form of rationality employed by such institutions. If the rationality is not reducible to its institutional embodiment in this time and place, then it can (at least in theory) be tracked in other manifestations. This theoretical distinction also permits a shift in historical emphasis. In the case of ‘the arts of government’, Foucault studied ‘governmentality’ only insofar as it served to put into place a specific regime of power at a specific place and time (namely Western Europe of the 18th century and beyond). However, in Sécurité, territoire, population, with his announcement of the interest in ‘governmentality’ per se, Foucault detaches the term from the historical specificity with which it was originally devised and articulated. ‘Governmentality’ now names a form of rationality immanent in many

240 (1) “a juridico-political theory of power centered on the notion of the will and its alienation, transfer, and representation in a governmental apparatus”; (2) “a State apparatus that extended into and was supported by different institutions”; and; (3) “a general technique of the exercise of power that can be transferred to many different institutions and apparatuses.” (A2, 49).
different fields of life (not only within the arts of government)\textsuperscript{241} that has its origins in a much earlier periodization (linked all the way back to early Christian pastoral power).

Foucault’s introduction of governmentality as an independent field of study derives from his claim that, while it was foundational to the emergence of the arts of government in the Classical Age, it is also not reducible to such arts. Rather, governmentality is a “généralité singulière”\textsuperscript{242} that emerges prior to and independent of the modern arts of government. Specifically, governmentality has its roots in what Foucault terms ‘pastoral power’, associated with the rise of early Christianity. However, as I noted earlier, this notion of governmentality emerges only to undergo subsequent questioning almost immediately.\textsuperscript{243} A certain equivocation, if not direct modification, of the concept of governmentality is introduced in the context of his discussion of this pastoral power or, more specifically, that known to the Greek patriarchs of the third and fourth century AD (Foucault specifically names Gregory Nazianzen) as “\textit{oikonomia psuchôn}.” Foucault begins by translating this phrase as ‘l’économie des âmes,’\textsuperscript{244} but states right away that this “prend avec le pastorat une tout autre dimension et un tout autre champ de références”\textsuperscript{245} than with the Greek notion of \textit{oikos}. Rather than being restricted to the

\textsuperscript{241} For instance, it plays an central role in Foucault’s account of the formation of modern sexuality.
\textsuperscript{242} “singular generality”. M. Foucault, Manuscript on governmentality, quoted in M. Senellart, ‘Situation des cours,’ \textit{STP}, 490; \textit{SPT2}, 390.
\textsuperscript{243} The fact that Foucault almost immediately began to revise and rework the notion of governmentality seems not to have been full explored by the ‘governmentality studies’ group predominant in Anglo-American scholarship. This may be due to the fact that the full texts of the 1977-78 and 1978-79 lectures have not been published, much less translated into English, until quite recently. As a result, governmentality studies scholars tend to focus on the 1979 Stanford lectures ‘\textit{Omnes et singulatim}’. On governmentality studies in the Anglo-American context, see especially Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, \textit{The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality} (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), A. Barry, T. Osborne, and N. Rose, \textit{Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and rationalities of government} (London: University College, 1996) and Mitchell Dean, \textit{Governmentality: Power and rule in modern society} (London: Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage, 1999).
\textsuperscript{244} ‘the economy of souls’
\textsuperscript{245} “takes on a completely different dimension and a completely different field of references with the pastorate”
household or management of the family (incorporating slaves, women and children), the economy of souls “doit porter sur la communauté de tous les chrétiens et sur chaque chrétien en particulier.” Thus, he concludes, because of the confused association of oikos to the household (whereas oikonomia psuchôn is more universal), perhaps ‘economy’ is not the translation best suited for the phrase. He notes that since the Latin translation of the term is regimen animarum, this would potentially lead us to employ “régime des âmes,” connecting pastoral power back to earlier discussions of the arts of government and, more precisely, to governmentality. However, Foucault specifically opts not to use the terms ‘régime’ or ‘gouvernement’ to describe this relationship. Rather, he takes advantage of another term in French which possess a useful ambiguity in meaning that is “assez intéressante pour traduire cette économie des âmes.” This term, rarely used in this context (except, Foucault claims, for some citations in Montaigne) is conduite (STP, 195-196; STP2, 192-193).

Whether or not Foucault is correct to use the word conduite in his translation of oikonomia psuchôn, and whether this particular kind of relationship can be accurately assigned to the activities of early Christians in this period is not something I am equipped to comment on. What matters for my purposes here is to note that even at this early stage (four years before the publication of ‘The subject and power’) Foucault was keen to draw an analytic distinction between gouvernement, gouvernementalité and conduite. He deliberately employs the term conduite because it contains within it a double sense not evoked by governmentality, something he sees as crucial to his analysis of this specific form of relationship. Foucault writes that the term conduite refers to two things:

---

246 “must bear on the whole Christian community and on each Christian in particular”
247 “quite interesting for translating this economy of souls”
La conduite, c’est bien l’activité qui consiste à conduire, la conduction si vous voulez, mais c’est également la manière dont on se conduit, la manière dont on se laisse conduire, la manière dont on est conduit et dont, finalement, on se trouve se comporter sous l’effet d’une conduite qui serait acte de conduite ou de conduction. (STP, 196-197; emphasis added)248

Because ‘conduite’ brings forth both the act of governing and the behaviour or comportment of the governed in a mutually influencing relationship, Foucault concludes that ‘conduite des âmes’ is ‘the least bad’ translation for *oikonomia psuchôn* and that it is only on the basis of this conceptualization that we can analyze how pastoral power “s’est ouverte la crise du pastorat et comment le pastorat a pu en quelque sorte exploser, se disperser et prendre la dimension de la gouvernementalité a pu se poser à partir du pastorat.” (STP, 197)249 In other words, in order to account for the transformation of the pastorate— in order to properly account for how one resisted it and, at the same time, brought into existence a new domain of knowledge/power— Foucault draws our attention to the pastorate as a domain not of governmentality, but of conduct. By employing the term ‘conduct’ he is drawing attention not merely to the activities of the governors, but also of the governed and to the notion that the space between these two can never be totally collapsed. The practices of governance do not act directly on the governed, thus they are never performed perfectly. Rather, since they act upon the *conduct* of the governed, a conduct which is always in part about how the governed *conduct themselves* within such activities, these two sides of the field of power here described are interrelated but not reducible to each other. In emphasizing a relationship rather than an act,

---

248 “Conduct is the activity of conducting (conduire), of conduction (la conduction) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (se conduit), lets oneself be conducted (se laisse conduire), is conducted (est conduit), and finally, in which one behaves (se comporter) as an effect of a form of conduct (une conduite) as the action of conducting or of conduction (conduction).” (STP2, 193; emphasis added)

249 “opened up and how [it] was burst open, broke up, and assumed the dimension of governmentality, or how the problem of government, of governmentality, was able to arise on the basis of the pastorate.” (STP2, 193)
Foucault has opened up a new line of inquiry: how freedom is exercised not only in tactical resistance to governance, but also as an activity on oneself characterized as a mode or manner of being (se conduire, se comporter) that brings into existence a new domain of thought and action. He writes that on the basis of this new analysis, we have something new to study: not merely institutions, nor governing rationalities, nor even revolutionary actions against these first two. Rather, we can also look to the alterations in the way or manner in which people conducted themselves in relation to the first two. Foucault asks,

> Et tout comme il y a eu des formes de résistance au pouvoir en tant qu’il exerce une souveraineté politique, de même qu’il y a eu d’autres formes de résistance, également voulues, ou de refus qui s’adressent au pouvoir en tant qu’il exploite économiquement, est-ce qu’il n’y a pas eu des formes de résistance au pouvoir en tant que conduite? (STP, 198)

These ‘revolts of conduct’, Foucault states, are of a different type than political or economic revolts of governance since they are not aimed at the overthrow, or reversal of “le pouvoir en tant qu’il exerce une souveraineté.” Rather, they are much more diffuse, subtle and localized—consisting often in the modification of an activity within a given domain of activities and experiences (he provides examples from war, religion and medicine). Individuals continue to perform the actions assigned to them by the practices of governance in a specific domain of activity, but by changing their conduct, the way they relate to themselves within their given roles and duties, these people not only modify the field but, over time, bring into being a new field. Foucault struggles to find an appropriate term for this kind of intentional practice of freedom within a range of

---

250 “Just as there have been forms of resistance to power as the exercise of political sovereignty, and just as there have been other, equally intentional forms of resistance or refusal that were directed at power in the form of economic exploitation, have there not been forms of resistance to power as conducting?” (STP2, 195)

251 “power exercised by a form of sovereignty” (STP2, 196)
prescribed possible activities, referring to ‘insoumission’ (insubordination), ‘dissidence’ and ‘inconduite’ (misconduct) before settling on ‘contre-conduite’ defined as something more than passively not behaving oneself properly, but less than becoming a full adversary to governing power in the hopes of replacing it (STP, 205; STP2, 201).

This introduction of the concept of ‘conduct’ and its dual senses brings to light a general transition in Foucault’s thought in this period. It is a move away from ‘governmentality’ towards ‘conduct’, from the ‘war-model’ to the ‘game-model’, from freedom as tactical and reactionary to freedom as relational and creative, from freedom as defined by what we do, to freedom defined in relation to how we do what we do—a kind of relationship to what one is doing. Of course, the introduction of the term is not a radical break with previous analysis. But this is partially demonstrative of precisely his point. What begins as a small shift in emphasis in the way Foucault rephrases himself in relation to his own work slowly transforms into a new question and new research agenda. We might say that by highlighting the term conduite Foucault has modified his conduct, the results of which cannot be fully seen from the standpoint of this current formulation.252 Even at this early stage, however, we see Foucault reposition himself in relation to a new emerging thesis. He begins to reposition his work, opening up the possibility of thinking about power and freedom in terms other than merely moral (i.e., whether a particular act is ‘good’, and thus can be named as an act of freedom, or ‘bad’ and thus reducible to mere power). Instead, we might also think of Foucault’s ‘conduct’

---

252 Locating Foucault’s use of the term ‘conduct’ here as key to the slow shift described above is supported by the reading given by the editor of Foucault’s lectures, Michel Senellart. He writes, “L’idée de ‘contre-conduite’, selon l’expression proposée plus bas, représente une étape essentielle, dans la pensée de Foucault, entre l’analyse des techniques d’assujettissement et celle, développée à partir de 1980, des pratiques de subjectivation.” (STP, 221, ft.5) Translation: “The idea of ‘counter-conduct,’ in the expression advanced below, represents an essential stage in Foucault’s thought, between the analysis of techniques of subjection and that, developed from 1980, of practices of subjectivation.” (STP2, 217, ft.5)
in ontological terms—as modes of being which are disclosive of a domain of objects.\textsuperscript{253}

In comments offered in 1978, Foucault suggests as much by arguing that “la philosophie peut-elle jouer encore un rôle du côté du contre-pouvoir... à condition en somme que la philosophie cesse de poser la question du pouvoir en terme de bien ou de mal, mais en terme d’existence.” \textit{(DE2, 540)}\textsuperscript{254} Here, I believe we can see Foucault reposition himself away from questions of the constituting power of subjects and towards an analysis of the kinds of relationships that open space for a working out of alternative possibilities (relationships of power and conduct). He is, I suggest, moving toward an analysis of freedom as characteristic of a certain of relationship between entities, not as a property of the subject (a free will), nor as a particular kind of action by the subject (an act of resistance). Put more succinctly, this is the freedom of situations not subjects.

In sum then, we can observe a slow transition in terminology that tracks a parallel change in the predominant themes and questions for analysis. Foucault begins with a study of (a) the ‘arts of government’ and the related institutions of the modern nation state. He then isolates and generalizes one feature of these arts: (b) ‘governmentality’ as a form of punititive rationality not reducible to modern state governance proper, but also observable in previous eras, in other domains. Finally, when following this thread of governmentality back to the emergence of pastoral power, Foucault concedes that ‘governmentality’ as a ‘singular generality’ cannot account of the slow modification of relationships of power over time. In order to do this, he introduces the notion of (c) ‘conduct’ in order to highlight the irreducible space between acts of governance and the

\textsuperscript{253} For evidence that this corresponded with a gradual reintroduction of Heidegger into Foucault’s citations and references, see Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{254} “philosophy might still play a role on the side of counter-power... on condition, in short, that it stops posing the question of power in terms of good and evil, but poses it \textit{in terms of existence}.” ‘La philosophie analytique du pouvoir,’ (27 April 1978); \textit{DE2}, 540. My translation; emphasis added.
comportment or self-conduct of the governed. In other words, ‘conduct’ raises the question of the space of freedom in terms of existence.

I.C. Experience and Thought

Je suis fasiné par l’histoire et par le rapport entre l’expérience personnelle et les événements dans lesquels nous nous inscrivons. C’est là, je pense, le noyau de mes désirs théoriques. (DE2, 1347)²⁵⁵

At the same time as Foucault struggled to find an appropriate vocabulary for ‘conduct’, he was returned to and reformulating his use of the terms ‘experience’ and ‘thought’. These last two terms provide another crucial point of departure for the interrogation of his work in relation to ontology. Foucault returned to the notion of ‘experience’ (after having nearly abandoned it from L’archéologie du savoir to La volonté de savoir) because taking his object of study as the ‘historically singular forms of experience’ (and not, say, domains of knowledge nor practices of governance operating directly on bodies) allowed him to incorporate the element of contingency and freedom as a space of possibilities within such ‘experiences’, thus providing for the ontological condition of such knowledge and power practices. Interestingly, this move to ‘forms of experience’ roughly parallels Kant’s move to transcendental finitude (as outlined in Chapter One). Just as Kant redefined subjective finitude positively, making it the condition of possibility for knowledge and thus freedom qua autonomy, Foucault makes a similar move away from subjective finitude towards historical contingency in the

²⁵⁵ “I am fascinated by history and the relationship between personal experience and those events of which we are a part. I think that is the nucleus of my theoretical desires.” (EW1, 124)
presencing of the forms of experience defined ontologically. As I will argue later, this opens up space for what Heidegger called ‘the ontological difference’—the distinction between that which is present within a given clearing (the domains of knowledge and practices of governance in a given era) and ‘that which presences’. Although Foucault did not take up this possibility, it is opened by his use of the term ‘experience’ and is a route of thought worth pursuing in order to better make sense of his later writings on freedom and ethics. To begin this discussion, we might look to the relatively obscure text known as the ‘unpublished’ preface to volume II of *Histoire de la sexualité*, perhaps Foucault’s most Heideggerian piece.

Foucault states that the object of the work in *Histoire de la sexualité* was to analyze sexuality “comme une forme d’expérience historiquement singulière.” (DE2, 1397) Of course, as he himself anticipates, it is not altogether clear to what a ‘form of experience’ refers, but it does seem to conjure a relation back to his earliest works on madness, unreason, and the like as phenomenological studies of ‘experience’ within historical-cultural milieux. In fact, Foucault himself makes the link explicit. He writes that “Étudier ainsi, dans leur histoire, des formes d’expérience est un thème qui m’est venu d’un projet plus ancien: celui de faire usage des méthodes de l’analyse

256 Marc Djaballah makes a similar argument about late Foucault’s repositioning relative to Kant. See his *Kant, Foucault and the Forms of Experience* (NY & London: Routledge, 2008), esp. chapters three and four.
257 Jana Sawicki has commented on this as well: “It is Heidegger’s contention that the Cartesian search for an absolute foundation in the subject of knowledge is itself at the root of the relentless quest for certainty and for mastery that characterizes modernity and culminates in a nihilism in which all of our options increasingly become technological and all of our values instrumental. Heidegger’s notion of the ‘ontological difference,’ i.e., the difference between the clearing and what shows up in it, guarantees his escaping nihilism, for it guarantees that there are other possibilities for self-understanding (and for understanding nature) to be attained through meditative thinking.” Sawicki, ‘Heidegger and Foucault,’ p.68.
259 “as a historically singular form of experience.” (EW1, 199).
existentielle.” However, he concedes this project failed for two reasons. First, “son insuffisance théorique dans l’élaboration de la notion d’expérience,” and, second, “l’ambiguïté de son lien avec une pratique psychiatrique que tout à fois il ignorait et supposait. (DE2, 1398) The emergence of ‘experience’ as the primary locus of investigation is surprising then, given that Foucault himself specifically repudiated use of the term. He is confronted by a difficult task in renewing the term then. If ‘experience’ failed to serve as a stable locus of investigation before, then how can the task of studying its as a ‘historical singularity’ proceed more successfully? In Foucault’s own words, the challenge is to analyze experience without merely resorting to (a) a “general theory of the human being” (the transcendental response), or (b) a “philosophical anthropology and a social history” (the positivist response). The struggle is to think forms of experience without reducing them to either the ahistorical experiences of a transcendental subject or merely the ‘products’ of a deterministic set of historical forces.

260 “To study forms of experience in this way—in their history—is an idea that originated with an earlier project, in which I made use of the methods of existential analysis.” ; “its theoretical weakness in elaborating the notion of experience,” ; “its ambiguous link with a psychiatric practice, which it simultaneously ignored and took for granted.” (EW1, 200) These two problems, which Foucault struggled to resolve, I have referred to in the previous chapter under the headings of (1) historicizing the forms of experience as presented to the subject and (2) studying the relationship between these forms of experience and the techniques of governance within institutional practices.

261 For instance, The Archealogy of Knowledge specifically rejected the study of an ‘experience of madness’ by associating it with the philosophy of the transcendental subject. In a different text, L’Ordre du discours, Foucault restated this. There he said his aim was specifically not to study ‘experience’ but rather “une volonté de savoir qui imposait au sujet connaissant (et en quelque sorte avant toute expérience).” (OD, 18-19) Translation: “a will to know imposed on the knowing subject (and in some sense prior to all experience).” My translation; emphasis added.

262 There is a third sense of ‘experience’ beyond that offered in either early works on madness and psychiatry or late works on ethics and thought. This third sense of the term derives from the tradition that includes Nietzsche, Bataille, Blanchot and Klossowski. This tradition, also opposed to the phenomenology of everydaylife used the term ‘experience’ to refer to a limit-state. The phenomenological tradition had been, according to Foucault, concerned with “a certain way of bringing a reflective gaze to bear on some object of ‘lived experience,’ on the everyday in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meanings.” By contrast, the understanding of experience with which Foucault worked during his middle writings attempted not to reassemble the phenomenology of ‘everyday’ life, but rather used the term ‘experience’ to
Foucault explains that in order to accomplish this task what was required was “de mettre au jour le domaine où la formation, le développement, la transformation des formes d’expérience peuvent avoir lieu: c’est-à-dire une histoire de la pensée.” (DE2, 1398). So, we can see in this last passage, that Foucault has returned to a second major theme which was virtually non-existent in his ‘middle’ writings (especially so in Discipline and Punish). Not only has the concept of ‘experience’ returned as important, but ‘thought’ has also taken up a newly revamped role and these two concepts appear to be internally related. That is to say, part of what defines the specificity of the phrase ‘historically singular form of experience’ for Foucault is that it is inhabited by ‘thought’. Elsewhere, he even goes so far as to claim that “Pas d’expérience qui ne soit une manière de penser et ne puisse être analysée du point de vue d’une histoire de la pensée.” (DE2, 1399). This appears to differentiate ‘forms of experience’ from, for example, épistémès which Foucault defined in The Archaeology of Knowledge without reference to ‘thought’ as such. There, he defined épistémès as

l’ensemble des relations pouvant unir, à une époque donnée, les pratiques discursives qui donnent lieu à des figures épistémologiques, à des sciences,

---

263 “to bring to light the domain where the formation, development, and transformation of forms of experience can situate themselves—that is, a history of thought.” (EWI, 200).
264 “[N]either those determinations nor those structures can allow for experiences... except through thought. There is no experience that is not a way of thinking and cannot be analyzed from the viewpoint of the history of thought; this is what might be called the principle of irreducibility of thought.” (EWI, 201)
At least if we take Foucault’s statement on épistémès in The Archaeology to be authoritative, it appears that épistémès do not attempt to engage at the level of the ‘discursive practices’ themselves, interpreting, for example, their meaning and use within their respective domains or in relation to their specific epistemological figures. Rather, épistémè is a concept introduced to point to a set of relations between different discursive practices with the aim of demonstrating a general unity, located not in “l’existence de l’objet... ou la constitution d’un horizon unique de l’objectivité; ce serait le jeu des règles qui rendent possible pendant une période donnée l’apparition d’objets.” (AS, 46)

Examining these ‘rules of formation’ allows for a mapping of structural similarities across discursive fields (such as the fields of life, labour and language presented in Les mots et les choses) without engaging with the practices which gave rise to the archaeological units in each field. By contrast, ‘historically singular forms of experience’ are meant to transpose this question precisely down to the level of the practical activities

---

265 “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems; the way in which, in each of these discursive formations, the transitions to epistemologization, scientificity, and formalization are situated and operate; the distribution of these thresholds... the lateral relations that may exist between epistemological figures or sciences insofar as they belong to neighbouring, but distinct, discursive practices. The episteme is not a form of knowledge (connaissance) or type of rationality which... manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyzes them at the level of discursive regularities. (AK, 211; emphasis added)

266 “the existence of the object... nor the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity.. It would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time” (AK, 36).
of subjects within a domain and to inquire into the mutability of such practices insofar as they produce possibilities of self-to-self relations previously impossible. By evoking ‘experience’, not from the standpoint of the phenomenology of the individual subject, but rather as a domain of practices that share a broad family resemblance, Foucault has moved away from studying (1) how a body of knowledge came to gain its status as a science both through the vertical relationship between its discursive practices and its epistemological objects, on the one hand, and the horizontal integration of it with other domains of knowledge in a given epoch (archaeology as form of historical epistemology) to (2) the study of disciplinary practices on bodies and the tactical games of reversal and resistance to such governmentality (a genealogy), and finally, to (3) a study of the ways in which subjects relate to themselves as a practice of self-transformation which, in turn, discloses a new domain of objects or entities to which one relates (an historical ontology). This periodization might be further analyzed through the tripartite division of knowledge, punitive rationality and thought.

267 There are hints that, even at the earliest stages of his work, Foucault was troubled by this question of how to integrate ‘thought’ into an analysis of the conditions for knowledge in a given epoch. In a revealing passage of *Les mots et les choses*, Foucault admits that his analysis as formulated there cannot properly account for the capacity to think differently within *épistémè* and thus effect historical change. He confesses the importance of this question, only to defer it:

Le discontinu—le fait qu’en quelques années parfois une culture cesse de penser comme elle l’avait fait jusque-là, et se met à penser autre chose et autrement—ouvre sans doute sur une érosion du dehors, sur cet espace qui est, pour la pensée, de l’autre côté, mais où pourtant elle n’a cessé de penser dès l’origine. À la limite, le problème qui se pose c’est celui des rapport de la pensée à la culture: comment se fait-il que la pensée ait un lieu dans l’espace du monde, qu’elle y ait comme une origine, et qu’elle ne cesse, ici et là, de commencer toujours à nouveau? Mais peut-être n’est-il pas temps encore de poser le problème; il faut probablement attendre que l’archéologie de la pensée se soit davantage assurée, qu’elle ait mieux pris la mesure de ce qu’elle ait peut décrire directement et positivement, qu’elle ait défini les systèmes singuliers et les enchaînements internes auxquels elle s’adresse, pour entreprendre de faire le tour de la pensée et de l’interroger dans la direction par où elle s’échappe à elle-même. Qu’il suffise donc l’ordre empirique, à la fois évident et obscur, où elles se donnent. (*MC*, 100-101) “Discontinuity—the fact that within the space of a few years a culture sometimes ceases to think as it had been thinking up till then and begins to think other things in a new way—probably begins with an erosion from outside, from that space which is, for thought, on the other side, but in which it has never ceased to think from the very beginning. Ultimately, the problem that presents itself is that of the relations
Beginning with the reflections in the ‘unpublished’ preface to volume II of *The History of Sexuality*, we can actually track three different ways in which Foucault formulates the relationship between ‘thought’ and ‘experience’. The first relationship is the most closely aligned with his early writings on *épistémès* and the human sciences. In this sense, ‘thought’ refers to the totality of what appears as meaningful knowledge within a field of experience and the operations by which this knowledge gains status as a science. ‘Thought’ here refers to that which is eligible for claims about truth and falsehood. For the sake of terminological clarity, we might refer to this as a body of ‘knowledge’.

The second use of the word thought actually brings Foucault closer to the hermeneutic tradition. This second sense is evoked when he speaks of ‘thought’ as something that ‘inhabits’ our activities. He writes,

> La ‘pensée’ ainsi entendue n’est donc pas à rechercher seulement dans des formulations théoriques, comme celles de la philosophie ou de la science; elle peut et doit être analysée dans toutes les manières de dire, de faire, de se conduire où l’individu se manifeste et agit comme sujet de connaissance, comme sujet éthique ou juridique, comme sujet conscient de soi et des autres. En ce sens, la pensée est considérée comme la forme même de l’action... L’étude des formes d’expérience pourra donc ce faire à partir d’une analyse ‘pratiques’ discursives ou non, si on désigne par là les différents systèmes d’action en tant qu’ils sont habités par la pensée ainsi entendue. (*DE2*, 1398-99; emphasis added.)

between thought and culture: how is it that thought has a place in the space of the world, that it has its origin there, and that it never ceases, in this place or that, to begin anew? But perhaps it is not yet time to pose this problem; perhaps we should wait until the archaeology of thought has been established more firmly, until it is better able to gauge what it is capable of describing directly and positively, until it has defined the particular systems and internal connections it has to deal with, before attempting to encompass thought and to investigate how it contrives to escape itself. For the moment, then, let it suffice that we accept these discontinuities in the simultaneously manifest and obscure empirical order wherever they posit themselves.” (*OT*, 56)

268 “‘Thought,’ understood in this way, then, is not to be sought only in theoretical formulations such as those of philosophy or science; it can and must be analyzed in every manner of speaking, doing, or behaving in which the individual appears and acts as knowing subject [*sujet de connaissance*], as ethical or juridical subject, as subject conscious of himself and others. In this sense, *thought is understood as the very form of action*... The study of forms of experience can thus proceed from an analysis of ‘practices’—discursive or not—as long as one qualifies that word to mean the different systems of action *insofar as they are inhabited by thought* as I have characterized it here. (*EW1*, 200-201; emphasis added.)
Elsewhere, in the published preface to volume II of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault puts an even stronger hermeneutic slant on this formulation, defining the task of philosophy as such: “savoir dans quelle mesure le travail de penser sa propre histoire peut affranchir la pensée de ce qu’elle *pense silencieusement* et lui permettre de penser autrement” (*UP*, 17; emphasis added).269 Thus, Foucault not only appears to find a form of thought embedded within everyday practices, but also positions ‘philosophy’ as a specific, specialized activity whose aim is to make this implicit thought *explicit*— to turn its silence into voice.270 Paradoxically perhaps, the introduction of ‘what we silently think’ as a kind of meaning embedded within our practices returns Foucault back to the very thing he criticized in *Les mots et les choses*. Recall that there Foucault associated the modern *cogito*, which he sought to historicize and subject to critique, with the “tâche incessante”:

> une forme explicite l’articulation de la pensée sur ce qui en elle, autour d’elle, au-dessous d’elle n’est pas pensée, mais ne lui est pas ou autant étranger, selon une irréductible, une infranchissable extériorité.... l’interrogation toujours recommencée pour savoir comment la pensée habite hors d’ici, et pourtant sur plus proche d’elle-même, comment elle peut être sous les espèces du non-pensant. (*MC*, 482)271

269 “to know to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.” (*UP*-2, 9; translation amended, emphasis added)

270 He even states at one point: “La pensée, ça existe, bien au-delà, bien en deçà des systèmes et des édifices de discours. C’est quelque chose qui se cache souvent, mais anime toujours les comportements quotidiens. Il y a toujours un peu de pensée même dans les institutions les plus sottes, il y a toujours de la pensée même dans les habitudes muettes,” and that ‘critique’ “consiste à voir sur quels types d’évidences, de familiarités, de modes de pensée acquis et non réfléchis reposent les pratiques que l’on accept.” (*DE2*, 999) The relationship between criticism and thought here appears to reflect closely the relationship between interpretation and understanding in Heidegger. Translation: “Thought does exist, both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse. It is something that is often hidden but always drives everyday behaviours. There is always a little thought occurring even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits”; “consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based.” (*EW3*, 456)

271 “ceaseless task” : “an explicit form the articulation of thought on everything within it, around it, and beneath it which is not thought, yet which is nevertheless not foreign to thought, in the sense of an irreducible, an insuperable exteriority... the constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside
This attempt to get ‘behind’ or ‘beneath’ our activities to reveal the hidden ‘unthought’ at work is the task of hermeneutic inquiry. This formulation brings Foucault, if only momentarily (we shall see below that he almost immediately reverses his position on this question) closer to Heidegger’s notion of preontological understanding. Furthermore, Foucault’s use of the term ‘thought’ during this period to describe a feature of everyday practices which is not itself reducible to consciously held ideas or concepts, leads him to offer a provisional definition of the ‘human being’ in a manner similar to Heidegger’s use of Dasein. Foucault states that his goal is to study ‘the human being’ as that which “‘problématise’ ce qu’il est, ce qu’il fait et le monde dans lequel il vit.” (UP, 18) This echoes, intentionally or not, Heidegger’s definition of Dasein as that for whom its existence is an issue as well as the notion that this particular kind of being (i.e., Dasein) is defined by the relationship between its preontological understanding and its self-interpreting activity (not, therefore, by a substance metaphysics which attempts to identify a fixed nature).

Even while briefly reintroducing this hermeneutic use of the term ‘thought’, Foucault almost immediately qualifies this and introduces a final third sense of the term. It is this third sense of the term which sees Foucault attempt to cast his analysis in terms elsewhere than here, and yet so very close to itself; how it can be in the forms of non-thinking.” (OT, 353)

272 Another place where Foucault seems to evoke the language of hermeneutic phenomenology is during his candidacy presentation to the Collège de France. There he poses the question of how to study ‘knowledge’ [savoir], and argues that knowledge exists along a spectrum, “going from almost silent habits transmitted by tradition to duly transcribed experimentations and precepts”. He states that his task it to “determine the different levels of such a knowledge, its degrees of consciousness, its possibilities of adjustment and correction. Thus, the theoretical problem that appears is that of an anonymous social knowledge [savoir] which does not take individual conscious learning [connaissance] as a model or foundation.” (‘Candidacy Presentation’ EW1, 8).

273 “problématizes what it is, what it does and the world in which it lives” (UP-2, 10)

274 On these connections, see Béatrice Han, Foucault’s Critical Project, p.190.
of ontology by suggesting there may be a mode of relating to oneself that (to employ Heideggerian terminology) reveals our revealing-in-action. This is the third sense of thought: a movement of the self in relation to itself which simultaneously discloses us as already within and constituted by meaningful relations (of subjects, objects and practices) and as capable of bringing forth new worlds. Foucault writes,

> Par ‘pensé’, j’entends ce qui instaure, dans diverses formes possible, le jeu du vrai et du faux et qui, par conséquent, constitue l’être humain comme sujet de connaissance; ce qui fonde l’acceptation ou le refus de la règle et constitue l’être humain comme sujet social et juridique; ce qui instaure le rapport avec soi-même et avec les autres, et constitue l’être humain comme sujet éthique. (DE2, 1398)

So, in this formulation at least ‘thought’ appears as what might be called a ‘constituting event’. It is not reducible to either (a) knowledge as a body of systemized possible claims of truth or falsehood, a science, nor is it (b) a preontological understanding inhabiting all meaningful activity. Rather, Foucault repeatedly states that thought establishes and constitutes. More specifically, thought is what establishes and constitutes an epistemic field or horizon of intelligibility which, through its determination of what can count as meaningful within the ‘play of true and false’ subsequently constitutes the human being as a subject. So, we might say that ‘thought’ opens up a domain of knowledge and action which, in turn, sets out the range of possible forms of subjectivity which we inhabit. ‘Thought’ in this instance is a constituting event.

But how exactly does this ‘thought’ arrive? What makes it possible? Here is where we see Foucault attempting to navigate between the two problematic poles of: (a) the philosophy of the constituting subject, which seeks the possibility of thought in

---

275 “By ‘thought,’ I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject [sujet de connaissance]; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject. (EWI, 200-201)
transcendental consciousness (as with Descartes, Kant or Husserl) and (b) historical teleology, which seeks the possibility of thought in the unfolding of a rational telos working within our worldly activities themselves, whether we consciously comprehend them or not (as with Hegel or Marx). Certainly, Foucault seems to agree that the disclosure of a domain of knowledge and action occurs according to certain “déterminations concrètes de l’existence sociale” (DE2, 1399) such as material or economic structures. However, he also claims that such forces are never entirely determinant because the process of disclosure by which such forces come into play—by which they take their force and structure—is internally related to the process by which ‘thought’ comes into existence:

   ni ces déterminations ni ces structures ne peuvent donner lieu à des expériences... si ce n’est à travers la pensée. Pas d’expérience qui ne soit une manière de penser et ne puisse être analysée du point de vue d’une histoire de la pensée; c’est ce qu’on pourrait appeler le principe d’irréductibilité de la pensée. (DE2, 1399)

When we ask, however, what ‘thought’ means in this context, we must not understood it as a single form of cognitive reflection disengaged from the embodied practices of the subject, nor to a secret ‘rule’, ‘theory’ or ‘picture’ that we are implicitly or unconsciously drawing upon to guide our actions. Rather, ‘thought’ here refers to a supposed movement of the self-in-the-world back upon itself. Since this movement is not universally given, but is rather a relational practice within a historically singular form of experience, “cette pensée a une historicité qui lui est propre... c’est là ce qu’on pourrait appeler le principe

---

276 “concrete determinations of social existence” (EW1, 201)
277 “[N]either those determinations nor those structures can allow for experiences... except through thought. There is no experience that is not a way of thinking and cannot be analyzed from the viewpoint of the history of thought; this is what might be called the principle of irreducibility of thought.” (EW1, 201)
And finally, since the forms of thought in a given period themselves make possible new relations between the self and itself, the historical disclosure of thought contains within it the immanent possibility of its own transformation. This is what Foucault calls the ‘third principle’:

> la critique, entendue comme analyse des conditions historiques selon lesquelles se constituaient les rapports à la vérité, à la règle et à soi, ne fixe pas des frontières infranchissable et ne décrit pas des systèmes clos; elle fait apparaître des singularités transformables, ces transformations ne pouvant s’effectuer que par un travil de la pensée sur elle-même: ce serait là le principe de l’histoire de la pensée comme activité critique. (DE2, 1399)

In light of this third and final reconstruction of ‘thought’ Foucault reexamines his previous work. Looking back to the studies of madness and psychiatry, he describes his project as being one of outlining “un foyer d’expérience que j’essayais de décrire du point de vue de l’histoire de la pensée” even while admitting that “l’usage que je faisais du mot ‘expérience’ y était très flottant” (DE2, 1400). The new formulation of ‘experience’ is now understood not from the standpoint of the phenomenology of the individual subject: as something that occurs ‘within’ the subject. Rather, it is understood as a historically singular domain of possible thought and action in relationships between subjects and object, subjects and subjects, and subjects and themselves, which contain possibilities for its immanent transformation. On this basis, Foucault seeks to demonstrate how a history of such ‘experiences’ will be the foundation for the possibility

---

278 “thought has a historicity which is proper to it... This is what could be called the principle of singularity of the history of thought: there are events of thought.” (EWI, 201)

279 “criticism—understood as analysis of the historical conditions that bear on the creation of links to truth, to rules, and to the self—does not mark out impassable boundaries or describe closed systems; it brings to light transformable singularities. These transformations could not take place except by means of a working of thought upon itself; that is the principle of the history of thought as critical activity. (EWI, 201)

280 “a locus of experience that I tried to describe from the point of view of the history of thought”; “the use that I made of the word ‘experience’ was very floating.” (EWI, 202; translation amended.)
of a history of being, since such a domain not only forms an “ensemble de règles, de
recettes, de moyens en vue d’une fin” (the ethical-political concern), but also
“détermine un domaine d’objets à propos desquels il est possible d’articuler des
propositions vraies ou fausses” (the ontological concern) (DE2, 845; emphasis added)."282
It is only with an eye to historically singular experiences, and their related forms of
thought or transformable singularities, that a history of being and truth can proceed.
Again evoking very Heideggerian language Foucault writes,

\[
\text{c’est une entreprise pour dégager quelques-uns des éléments qui pourraient servir à
servir à une histoire de la vérité. Une histoire qui ne serait pas celle de ce qu’il peut y avoir de vrai dans les connaissances; mais une analyse des ‘jeux de vérité’,
des jeux du vrai et du faux à travers lesquels l’être se constitue historiquement comme expérience, c’est-à-dire comme pouvant et devant être pensé. (UP, 13; emph}
\]

In stating that ‘Being’ is historically constituted as ‘experience’, Foucault has
obviously altered his analysis from previous works considerably. This formulation in
particular appears to be offering a more generalized account of ontology, even though the
level of investigation remains primarily historical. Foucault begins his work at the level
of the specific practices that together, over time, produced stabilized effects that could be
analyzed as historical forms of experience. The clearest example of this is that of modern
sexuality. However, here we see that there is a general thesis about how this historical
work connects to questions of fundamental ontology. For Foucault it seems a horizon of
intelligibility through which Being is made manifest to us is not exclusively (nor even

\begin{enumerate}
\item[281] “ensemble of rules, procedures, means to an end” (EW3, 230).
\item[282] “determines a domain of objects about which it is possible to articulate true or false propositions” (EW3, 230; emphasis added).
\item[283] “what I have tried to maintain for many years, is the effort to isolate some of the elements that might be useful for a history of truth. Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the ‘games of truth,’ the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought.” (UP-2, 6-7; emphasis added)
\end{enumerate}
primarily) presented through a set of consciously reflected upon concepts or principles.

‘Being’ as a horizon of intelligibility is not reducible to a body of knowledge or science to be investigated only through a mapping of structural regularities between discursive fields. Nor, however, can it be reduced to the practices of governance (what is done to us by others). Rather, Being is, for Foucault, revealed as experiences, not from the standpoint of the individual phenomenological subject, but as a set of possible ways of thinking and acting. Historically singular forms of experience cannot be investigated in the way that other objects might be. They are not ‘things’ we can stand back from, look at and analyze as they constitute the ontological ground of the forms of subjectivity that we inhabit. Hence, to study the historically singular forms of experience is to write a ‘historical ontology of oneself’.

The question remains in this, however, is what makes possible the movement by which a historically singular form of experience comes to be problematized? It is not enough to simply assert that experience is problematized and that this movement of problematization is the work of thought. Rather, we must examine how the ontological ground of oneself can be investigated at all, how it comes to be at issue for the subject in the first place. Only through this can we clarify Foucault’s position in relation to freedom.

II: Freedom in three stages: contingent event, thought, spiritual exercise

In the previous two sections of this chapter I have attempted, first, to establish the previous understanding of power/knowledge known as the model of war, and second, to outline three terminological equivocations that inaugurated the auto-critique leading to
Foucault’s final position. This has been tracked primarily through texts from the late 1970s up to approximately 1981. In this final section, I would like now to briefly analyze three stages in Foucault’s final analysis of the question of freedom. Here I will be drawing primarily upon essays and interviews such as ‘The subject and power’ [1982], ‘Technologies of the self’ [1982], ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics: An overview of work in progress’ [1983], ‘Polemics, Politics and Problematizations’ [1984], ‘The ethics of the concern of the self as a practice of freedom’ [1984], ‘What is Enlightenment?’ [1984] as well as lecture series such as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* [1981-82], *The Government of Self and Others* [1982-83], *The Courage of Truth* [1983-84], and *Fearless Speech* [1983]. These late writings are so rich and complex they have already produced a great body of literature on them. It is not, therefore, my interest (even if this were possible) to summarize all the lines of inquiry investigated within them. Rather, my aim is to think through these late works in relation to the question of ontology and freedom.

More specifically, it is my aim to demonstrate that, read through this lens, Foucault’s late works provide a detailed account of what I will refer to here as ontological projection—not as a willful construction of ‘new worlds’ but rather as a bringing forth of latent possibilities by making oneself the terrain of activity or locus of disclosure for a domain of experience. Put succinctly, Foucault’s late writings provide us with the richest account of the interrelation between the acquisition of knowledge, the revealing of a domain of entities and the ethical-spiritual transformation of the self. It is only from investigation of the meeting point of these three domains that a history of being—now cast as *historical ontology*—can proceed. The subsequent question is: how can one account for freedom within such a form of analysis? How, within this world-disclosure, the activities by
which the very presence of a domain of meaningful entities about which it is possible to make claims of truth/falseness or good/bad comes to be in the first place, does the possibility of thinking and acting otherwise than is given remain possible?

Foucault develops this analysis in three basic moves. First, he begins with an account of freedom as conditioned on the irreducibility of contingent eventalization, a notion most closely aligned with the ‘war-model’ discussed above. Next, seeing limitations in this analysis, Foucault moves to a notion of freedom as grounded in thought-as-problematization. Freedom, in this stage of analysis, consists in a grasping conceptually the historical conditions of possibility for a given domain of experience. This is what Foucault calls the principle of the irreducibility of thought. The final stage of Foucault’s analysis, however, consists in moving beyond even this towards a study of the *spiritual practices* by which the ethical transformation of the subject takes place. These practices are referred to as ‘spiritual’ precisely because they do not consist in merely affirming the unity or autonomy of the subject as the locus and ground of truth, but rather are taken up as means by which the subject can bring itself into alignment with a domain of experience both projected and actual. I argue, in other words these practices are ontologically disclosive.

This reading begins with the watershed piece ‘The subject and power’ which sets out the frame of reference for Foucault’s last writings. This article is a particularly important piece for the general discussion at hand because it is the first time that Foucault really attempts to set out in what particular way we might speak of ‘freedom’ in relation to the domains of experience and practices of thought discussed elsewhere. Whereas in the *Securité, territoire, population* lectures Foucault made room for a new form of
resistance, or counter-conduct, he did not fully explain how this new conduct was possible or how it altered his previous analysis of power. This is precisely what he attempts in ‘The subject and power’.

As part of his ‘auto-critique’, Foucault revises and refines his use of the term ‘power’. Under the model of war, seen most clearly in *Discipline and Punish,* power refers to a vast array of strategic activities of governance, not merely embedded in ideological formations, but also in direct manipulation of the physical body. Power seems ubiquitous and unmediated. In ‘The subject and power’, however, Foucault narrows his use of the term to only one precise kind of relationship within the total possible range of relations between social agents. Specifically,

> ce qui définit une relation de pouvoir, c’est un mode d’action qui n’agit pas directement et immédiatement sur les autres, mais qui agit sur leur action propre. Une action sur l’action, sur des action éventuelles, ou actuelles, futures ou présentes.” (DE2, 1055)\(^{284}\)

In an interview from the same period, Foucault gives an example to clarify what kind of action and what kind of relationship he is thinking of:

> Power is a set of relations. What does it mean to exercise power? It does not mean picking up this tape recorder and throwing it on the ground. I have the capacity to do so – materially, physically, sportively. But I would not be exercising power if I did that. However, if I take this tape recorder and throw it on the ground in order to make you mad, or so that you can’t repeat what I’ve said, or to put pressure on so that you’ll behave in such and such a way, or to intimidate you – well, what I’ve done, by shaping your behaviour through certain means, that is power. … I’m not forcing you at all and I’m leaving you completely free – that’s when I begin to exercise power... [Power] takes place when there is a relation between two free subjects, and this relation is unbalanced, so that one can act upon the other, and the other is acted upon, or allows himself to be acted upon.\(^{285}\)

\(^{284}\)“what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action that does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions.” (*EW3*, 340)

\(^{285}\)‘Interview with Michael Bess,’ *The History of the Present*, No.4 (Spring 1988), p.2 (emphasis added). This interview was originally conducted in 1980.
So, we can see that Foucault is not defining power here through the notion of ‘capacity’. My capacity to throw a tape recorder, for example, is not power. Rather, power is when I do something such as throw a tape recorder so as to influence the behaviour of others with whom I am in an already existing relationship. Of course, it is possible to use other human beings as mere objects, to relate to them as Foucault suggests one might relate to the tape recorder in the example above. However, in this case we are not speaking about a relationship of power. Rather, this would be mere domination or violence (DE2, 1005; EW3, 340). Hence, at minimum, ‘power’ requires recognizing and relating to the other within the relationship as something capable of responding. In a word, it is to relate to something or someone as though it were a ‘free subject’.

This leads us to a second major clarification Foucault makes. He states,

Quand on définit l’exercice du pouvoir comme un mode d’action sur les actions des autres, quand on les caractérise par le ‘gouvernement’ des hommes les uns par les autres—au sens le plus étendu de ce mot—, on y inclut un élément important: celui de la liberté. Le pouvoir ne s’exerce que sur des ‘sujets libres’, et en tant qu’ils sont ‘libres.’ (DE2, 1056)

The important thing to note is that ‘freedom’ here does not denote a property or capacity of the subject. Rather, it is a feature of the relationship to which one is subject. Now, one might imagine the following objection to this characterization of freedom by pointing to an inherent difference between, for example, a human being and a tape recorder. In the case of the tape recorder, if I smash it to the floor certainly I am not treating it as something capable of a response to my action. Thus, my action does not attempt to influence the action of a free subject. However, a critic might object, there is nothing I

---

286 “When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, [the ‘conduct of conducts’] when one characterises these actions as the government of men by other men – in the broadest sense of the term – one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. (EW3, 341-342)
can do that would constitute the tape recorder as a free subject. The ‘freedom’ (or non-freedom) of the tape recorder is not a function of the relations between us, but rather is a property of the object prior to the relationship. It is possible to treat a human as either a free subject or merely an object, but it is not possible to treat a tape recorder as a free subject. This demonstrates that ‘freedom’ does refer to some inherent capacity of particular kinds of entities, namely those with an autonomous will that is not reducible to the forces to which it is subject. However, it is precisely this notion of freedom as a property of the subject which an ontological form of analysis seeks to displace. We might begin to see this more clearly when we point out that not only are there all kinds of non-human entities to which we relate as though they are capable of some kind of original response (constrained as it may be by various factors, such as the case of animals, for instance), but also by the fact that in many cases humans are treated as though incapable of such responses (such as the case of, for instance, a person in a coma). The point is that ‘freedom’ actually names not a specific inherent property or capacity of certain entities, but rather refers to what Foucault calls “un champ de possibilité où plusieurs conduites, plusieurs réactions et divers modes de comportement peuvent prendre place.” (DE2, 1056) Furthermore, it is the relationship—the back and forth of actions upon actions—that not only sets out a range of possible future actions, but also, over time, constitutes the being of the entity in question. When I attempt to exercise ‘power’ in a relationship with something, rather than merely exercising physical force, I am in part recognizing that entity as something capable of a range of possible responses while simultaneously attempting to shape and alter this range. I am recognizing this entity as a

---

287 “a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behaviour are available.” (EW3, 342)
subject, but I am also *subjecting it*, in the sense that I am attempting to give the range of possible modes of thinking and acting by which this entity comes to be in the world in a specific form.

While Foucault focuses on human beings and their constitution as ‘subjects’ within specific historical forms of experience (e.g., sexuality), what is truly radical about his suggestion is that many kinds of entities can be related to as subjects in this sense. Foucault chooses to focus on the modes of *subjectification* and leaves undeveloped the relations of *objectification* by which other kinds of entities appear to us as objects, things or equipment. Heidegger (as we have seen) places emphasis on the latter, and leaves the modes of subjectification relatively undeveloped. However, these two kinds of analyses are complementary and, together, provide a more comprehensive account of historical ontology. Indeed, Foucault states explicitly that his analysis of the modes of subjectification are the complement to Heidegger’s analysis of the modes of objectification. He writes,

> For Heidegger, it was through an increasing obsession with *techné* as the only way to arrive at an understanding of objects that the West lost touch with Being. Let’s turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject, giving it its characteristic split of truth and error, freedom and constraint.\(^{288}\)

A third point of analysis is then clearly delineated by Foucault—what we might call the periodization of the techniques of subjectification and the particular forms of resistance they engender. While there are forms of resistance that struggle against violence—say, for instance, slave revolts in which people resist being treated as mere physical objects for labour—there is also a specific kind of resistance to the

\(^{288}\) M. Foucault, ‘About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self,’ *RC*, p. 161, ft. 4.
subjectification discussed above. Foucault states that his aim is to study the emergence
and predominance of these kinds of struggles: “luttes contres l’assujettissement, contre
les diverses formes de subjectivité et de soumission.” (DE2, 1046) Furthermore, the
need to study this particular kind of struggle is not itself due to the inherently
foundational, privileged or transcendental status of such struggle in relation to other kinds
(such as, for example, against religious domination or economic exploitation). Rather,
Foucault situates his targeting of this specific kind of resistance within the question first
broached by Kant: How can philosophy be something other than a study of universal
principles and instead pose the questions “‘Qu’est-ce qui ce passe en ce moment?
Qu’est-ce qui nous arrive? Quel est ce monde, cette période, ce moment précis où nous
vivons?’” (DE2, 1050) When Foucault asks himself these questions, his answer is that
we (in the modern European tradition) have become ‘complicated subjects’. That is to
say, because of the rise of pastoral power, of the government of individualization, of the
modern state as both individualizing and totalizing, we recognize ourselves as
‘subjects’—as entities with a specific set of inherent properties, interiorized but always
partially occluded from us, which stand in an internal relationship to the forms of power
exercised over us within specific domains of experience (such as sexuality, madness and
reason, etc.). We are complicated subjects precisely because these relationships which
constrain the range of possible thought and action also presuppose a range—and thus, the
latent possibility of an original or unique response to our present.

289 “struggles against subjection [assujettissement], against forms of subjectivity and submission” (EW3, 331)
290 “What’s going on just now? What’s happening to us? What is this world, this period, this precise
moment in which we are living?” (EW3, 335)
Fourthly, these relationships of power and freedom, of subjection and resistance, themselves operate “sur le champ de possibilité où vient s’inscrire le comportement de sujets agissant.” (*DE2*, 1056; emphasis added) In other words, it is not a mere matter of choice or will that determines what can possibly appear as an entity within which such relations of power, subjection, and resistance can take place. Rather—to employ Heideggerian terminology—all ‘subjects’ find themselves always already thrown within a field, or clearing, within which entities appear with which it is possible to have meaningful relations of this kind.

Finally, Foucault famously turned his attention in this final period to one kind of relationship and activity always latent within the field of possibilities in a given domain of experience: namely, the relationship of self to self. With the addition of this third axis of analysis (along with the modes of objectification and subjectification, or, alternatively, the techniques of production and signification), Foucault observes that

> il existe dans toutes les sociétés un autre type de technique: celles qui permettent à des individus d’effectuer, par eux-mêmes, un certain nombre d’opérations sur leur corps, leur âmes, leurs pensées, leurs conduites, et ce de manière à produire en eux une transformation, une modification, et à atteindre un certain état de perfection, de bonheur, de pureté, de pouvoir surnaturel. Appelons ces techniques les techniques de soi. (*DE2*, 989-990)

---

291 “operate[on] on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself” (*EW3*, 341; emphasis added)

292 In this respect, I diverge from the reading Hubert Dreyfus has offered of the possible similitude between ‘Being’ in Heidegger and ‘power’ in Foucault. Dreyfus argues that ‘Being’ and ‘power’ are roughly equivalent terms since ‘power’ names, for Foucault, that on the basis of which something can appear as an entity at all. However, I think this analysis ignores the way that Foucault modifies the use of the term ‘power’ in his late writings, using it to denote a specific kind of relationship existing within a field of possibilities. If anything, it is this ‘field of possibilities’ within a ‘historically singular form of experience’ that roughly parallels Heidegger’s notion of a clearing (*Lichtung*) and gestures towards ontology. See Hubert Dreyfus, “‘Being and Power’ revisited,” in *Foucault and Heidegger*, pp. 30-54. For a detailed critique of Dreyfus along these lines, see Béatrice Han, *Foucault’s Critical Project*, esp.’Conclusion’, pp.188-196.

293 “in all societies there is another type of technique: techniques that permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain
The analysis of these new ‘technologies of the self’ are then positioned as not merely parallel or independent from the previous questions of power, domination and knowledge production, but rather as central to the whole. In the 1981-82 lectures, *L’herméneutique du sujet*, he writes:

> si on prend la question du pouvoir, du pouvoir politique, en la replaçant dans la question plus générale de la gouvernementalité—gouvernementalité entendue comme un champ stratégique de relations de pouvoir, au sens plus large du terme et pas simplement politique,—, donc, si on entend par gouvernementalité un champ stratégique de relations de pouvoir, dans ce qu’elles ont de mobile, de transformable, de réversible, je crois que la réflexion sur cette notion de gouvernementalité ne peut pas ne pas passer, théoriquement et pratiquement, par l’élément d’un sujet qui serait défini par le rapport de soi à soi. Alors que la théorie du pouvoir politique comme institution se réfère d’ordinaire à une conception juridique du sujet de droit, il me semble que l’analyse de la gouvernementalité—c’est-à-dire: l’analyse du pouvoir comme ensemble de relations réversibles—doit se référer à une éthique du sujet défini par le rapport de soi à soi. Ce qui veut dire tout simplement que, dans le type d’analyse que j’essaie de vous proposer depuis un certain temps; vous voyez que: relations de pouvoir—gouvernementalité—gouvernement de soi et des autres—rapport de soi à soi, tout ceci constitue une chaîne, une trame, et que c’est là, autour de ces notions, que l’on doit pouvoir, je pense, articuler la question de la politique et la question de l’éthique. (*HS*, 242-243)

These five modifications, taken together, might be stated as follows: (a) power is a specific relationship of actions upon actions; (b) it only arises between ‘free subjects’; (c) a history of these kinds of relationships and the forms of resistance they engender (the state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power. Let us call these techniques ‘technologies of the self.’ (*EWA*, 177)

294 “if we take the question of power, of political power, situating it in the more general question of governmentality understood as a strategic field of power relations in the broadest and not merely political sense of the term, if we understand by governmentality a strategic field of power relations in their mobility, transformability, and reversibility, then I do not think that reflection on this notion of governmentality can avoid passing through, theoretically and practically, the element of a subject defined by the relationship of self to self. Although the theory of political power as an institution usually refers to a juridical conception of the subject of right, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality—that is to say, of power as a set of reversible relationships—must refer to an ethics of the subject defined by a relationship of self to self. Quite simply, this means that in the type of analysis I have been trying to advance for some time you can see that power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self to self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics. (*HS2*, 252)
resistance to subjectification) can be written; (d) such relations take place within an already existing field of possibilities not reducible to the actions of agents themselves as it is that upon which entities and subjects appear to whom one may related (a clearing), and; (e) such relations run alongside and interact in complex ways with another kind of relationship—that of self to self, for which a history can be written as well.

We can see above (point b), that Foucault argues for the necessity of including the concept of freedom within this analysis. What is less clear is how one accounts for this freedom. It may be necessary for the thesis regarding power and the ‘conduct of conduct’; it may even be necessary for a history of the games of truth and falsehood through which ‘being is historically constituted as experience’. However, to this point, Foucault has merely asserted its necessity, we have yet to see on what basis this assertion can be made.

There are, I think, basically three ways in which Foucault attempts to account for ‘freedom’ within the analysis of historical ontology provided in his late works. These three lines of analysis are developed in succession and slowly move us further away from the war-model to the game-model. The three attempts to account for freedom are what I will call here (1) the principle of contingent eventalization, (2) the principle of the irreducibility of thought, and (3) the ethical-spiritual transformation of the self.

The principle of contingent eventalization refers to the notion that a historically singular form of experience is not characterized by a single telos or arche governing it. Rather, it is a contingent set of internally contradictory practices that together over time produce a relatively stable set of social relations, institutions of governance and subjectivities. By stating that the ‘forms of experience’ are internally contradictory,
Foucault is attempting to highlight the notion that there is, in fact, no general épistémè or bounded gestalt to a particular set of activities that one could ever in a general, holistic manner, get clear of. He is warning against the conflation of relatively stable effects of practices and rules of use for the domain of experience produced by these effects.

‘Games’ are not hermetically sealed fields of activity, or structuralist totalities. Rather, ‘game’ merely refers here to a general set of activities which are multiple, conflicting and ever changing—what Foucault calls a “régime de pratiques” (DE2, 841). Since a domain of experience is internally contradictory, there is always a latent possibility for what Foucault calls an ‘event’. ‘Events’ consist in two moments: first, there is a “rupture des évidences” (DE2, 842) that makes visible the contingency and singularity of that which was previously taken to be universal and necessary. Secondly, “l’événementialisation consiste à retrouver les connexions, les rencontres, les appuis, les blocages, les jeux de force, les stratégies, etc., qui ont, à un moment donné, formé ce qui ensuite va fonctionner comme évidence, universalité, nécissité.” (DE2, 842)

It is important to note, however, that this does not yet carry us too far from the model of war, as the ‘event’ is really the product of conflict between competing practices and claims.

---

295 “regime of practices” (EW3, 225)
296 “a rupture [or breach] of [self-]evidence” (EW3, 226; translation modified).
297 “eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on, that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary.” (EW3, 226-7)
298 This emphasis on the haphazard, the conflictual, and the singular ‘events’ of history clearly relates back to what Foucault understood by the term ‘genealogy’ in his early works. For instance, in ‘Nietzsche, genealogy, history,’ he stated that genealogy must ‘repérer la singularité des événements, hors de toute finalité monotone’ and argued that the possibility of change was given only by the fact of the event, not as a decision, treaty, reign or battle, but as “un rapport de forces qui s’inverse, un pouvoir confisqué, un vocabulaire repris et retourné contre ses utilisateurs... Les forces qui sont en jeu dans l’histoire n’obéissent ni à une destination ni à une mécanique, mais bien au hasard de la lutte.” (DE1, 1016). Translation: “must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality”; “An event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it... The forces operating in
The second way in which Foucault seeks to reintroduce ‘freedom’ into his account of the historical ontology of ourselves is through the principle of the irreducibility of thought. The first step in this is a further refining and modification of the concepts of ‘thought’ (following from the equivocal use of the term discussed above) and ‘problematization’. Foucault argues that we can account for the space of freedom within a domain of experience not only because such a regime of practices is internally contradictory, but also because one aspect of any such regime is defined by practices by which selves relate back upon themselves. In so doing, they are able to slowly modify the conditions under which they find themselves and thus aid in bringing forth a new domain of entities and experiences. As we saw, Foucault begins to analyze this self-reflexivity under the traditional concept of ‘thought’. ‘Thought’ here appears to reach back to Foucault’s early work on historical a priori, since it names the movement by which one uses the ‘event’ or ‘breach of self-evidence’ (discussed above) to look out from within a form of experience to inquire into the historical conditions of possibility for such a problematic. This critical movement is what Foucault calls ‘problematization’. Foucault specifically links this kind of inquiry to questions of ontology, thereby invoking (while simultaneously modifying) a Heideggerian theme. He explicitly links the study of practices of problematization to the history of truth and to questions of ontology when he writes, for instance, that his work consists in analyzing

non les comportements ni les idées, non les sociétés ni leurs ‘idéologies’, mais les problematisations à travers lesquelles l’être se donne comme pouvant et devant

history are not controlled by destiny or regulative mechanisms, but the luck of the battle.” (EW2, 369, 380-381)
200

être pensé et les pratiques à partir desquelles elles se forment. (UP, 19; emphasis added)299

The ambiguity with which Foucault employs the term ‘thought’ is further complicated in

the interview ‘Politics, Polemics and Problematizations’. Foucault is worth quoting at

length:

J’ai longtemps cherché à savoir s’il serait possible de caractériser l’histoire de la

pensée en la distinguant de l’histoire des idées— c’est-à-dire de l’analyse des

systèmes de représentations—et de l’histoire des mentalités— c’est-à-dire de

analyse des attitudes et des schémas de comportement. Il m’a semblé qu’il y

avoir un élément qui était de nature à caractériser l’histoire de la pensée: c’était ce

qu’on pourrait appeler les problèmes ou plus exactement les problématisations.

Ce qui distingue la pensée, c’est qu’elle est out autre chose que l’ensemble des

représentations qui sous-tendent un comportement; elle est tout autre chose aussi

que le domaine des attitudes qui peuvent le déterminer. La pensée n’est pas ce

qui habite une conduite et lui donne un sens; elle est plutôt ce qui permet de

prendre du recul par rapport à cette manière de faire ou de réagir, de se la

donner comme objet de pensée et de l’interroger sur son sens, ses conditions et

ses fins. La pensée, c’est la liberté par rapport à ce qu’on fait, le mouvement par

lequel on s’en détache, on le constite comme objet et on le réfléchit comme

problème.

Dire que l’étude de la pensée, c’est l’analyse d’une liberté ne veut pas dire qu’on

a affaire à un système formel qui n’aurait de référence qu’à lui-même. En fait,

pour qu’on domaine d’action, pour qu’un comportement entre dans le champ de la

pensée, il faut qu’un certain nombre de facteurs l’aient rendu incertain, lui aient

fait perdre sa familiarité, ou aient suscité autour de lui un certain nombre de

difficultés. Ces éléments relèvent de processus sociaux, économiques, ou

politiques. Mais ils ne jouent là qu’un rôle d’incitation. Ils peuvent exister et

exercer leur action pendant très longtemps, avant qu’il y ait problématisation

effective par la pensée. Et celle-ci, lorsqu’elle intervient, ne prend pas une forme

unique qui serait le résultat direct ou l’expression nécessaire de ces difficultés;

elle est une réponse originale ou spécifique... À un même ensemble de difficulties

plusieurs réponses peuvent être données. Et la plupart du temps, des réponses

diverses sont effectivement proposées. Or ce qu’il faut comprendre, c’est ce qui

les rend simultanément possible; c’est le point où s’entacine leur simultanéité;

c’est le sol qui peut les nourrir les unes et les autres, dans leur diversité et en dépit

parfois de leur contradictions... Mais le travail d’une histoire de la pensée serait de

retrouver à la racine de ces solutions diverses la forme générale de

problématisation qui les a rendues possible—jusque dans leur opposition même;

299 “not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their ‘ideologies,’ but the problematizations through which

being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought—and the practices on the basis of which these

problematizations are formed. (UP2, 11; emphasis added)
This dense passage needs parsing out in more detail. The first move Foucault makes in this passage is to restate his opposition to the defining of ‘thought’ as something that ‘inhabits conduct’. This would seem to move him back away from the Heideggerian notion of thought as ‘preontological understanding’ and thus, away from the idea that a history of truth can be written from the perspective of a historical hermeneutics of the underlying cultural understandings of a given era. An example of such work might include, for instance, the historical hermeneutics of Charles Taylor.

300 “For a long time, I have been trying to see if it would be possible to describe the history of thought as distinct both from the history of ideas (by which I mean the analysis of systems of representation) and from the history of mentalities (by which I mean the analysis of attitudes and types of action [schémas de comportement]). It seemed to me there was one element that was capable of describing the history of thought—this was what one could call the element of problems or, more exactly, problematizations. What distinguishes thought is that it is something quite different from the set of representations that underlies a certain behaviour; it is also something quite different from the domain of attitudes that can determine this behaviour. Thought is not what inhabits a certain conduct and gives it its meaning; rather, it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem.

To say that the study of thought is the analysis of a freedom does not mean one is dealing with a formal system that has reference only to itself. Actually, for a domain of action, a behaviour, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from social, economic, or political processes. But here their only role is that of instigation. They can exist and perform their action for a very long time, before there is effective problematization by thought. And when thought intervenes, it doesn’t assume a unique form that is the direct result or the necessary expression of these difficulties; it is an original or specific response... To one set of difficulties, several responses can be made. And most of the time different responses actually are proposed. But what must be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their simultaneity is rooted; it is the soil that can nourish them all in their diversity and sometimes in spite of their contradictions.... But the work of a history of thought would be to rediscover at the root of these diverse solutions the general form of problematization that has made them possible—even in their opposition; or what has made possible the transformations of the difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions. It is problematization that responds to these difficulties, but by doing something quite other than expressing them or manifesting them: in connection with them, it develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given; it defines the elements that will constitute what the different solutions attempt to respond to.” (PPP, EW1117-8; emphasis added)
which inhabits our activities, Foucault seems to return to a quasi-Kantian account—arguing that ‘thought’ is a ‘stepping back’ from oneself, an objectifying gesture in relation to oneself that permits freedom in relation to oneself. But this is a considerable distance from the formulation Foucault gave but a few years earlier (especially in the prefaces to volume II of *The History of Sexuality*). ‘Being’ no longer offers itself to be understood through a series of problematizations. Rather, it is ‘the subject’ that thinks, ‘the subject’ that makes a movement of distancing in relation to itself, thus bringing forth the problematization on the basis of which an understanding of being is possible. When Foucault wrote in the preface to volume II of *The History of Sexuality* that his genealogy of the subject and truth could only proceed through a study of “les problematisations à travers lesquelles l’être se donne comme pouvant et devant être pensé,” (UP, 19; emphasis added)\(^{302}\) it appeared as though he had effected a close rapprochement with Heidegger. We are reminded in particular of Heidegger’s famous ‘es gibt’—the notion that Being ‘gives itself’ to man in the form of gift which Heidegger specifically employs to undermine the philosophy of the constituting subject. But in the long passage quoted above, this language drops out and Foucault returns to a definition of ‘thought’ and ‘problematization’ as a reflective activity by which *the subject* constitutes itself. Thus, as Béatrice Han has noted, while Foucault spoke of ‘historical ontology’ in his late works, he almost always speaks of it as the ‘historical ontology of ourselves’: that is, “an ontology understood from the perspective of a self-constitution of the subject.”\(^{303}\)

\(^{302}\) *Op cit.* at 61.

\(^{303}\) Béatrice Han, *Foucault’s Critical Project*, p. 194.
Han, and others, have argued that because Foucault’s notion of historical ontology is ultimately grounded in a reflective activity of the self-constituting subject, it cannot be brought into productive relationship to Heidegger’s understanding of ontology. However, I believe this reading misses opportunities to draw out ontological analysis in late Foucault that does not reside within this framework. It is true that Foucault employed a notion of ‘thought’ and ‘problematization’ that relied upon such a reflective selfconstitution and that he made this movement of thought at least the condition of freedom. However, it is also true that Foucault did not confuse this movement, this motion, with freedom itself. For example, we can note that in the passage quoted above, from ‘Politics, Polemics and Problematizations’, Foucault states that ‘thought’ “develops the conditions in which possible responses can be given” (emphasis added). The movement of self-objectification enables a set range of possible responses to a specific problematic, but it is not these responses themselves. The bringing forth of “diverse practical solutions” made possible by thought is thus analytically distinct from the movement of thought itself. It is to these ‘diverse practical solutions’, not to ‘thought’ or ‘problematization’ that I believe we must look for a grounding of freedom in ontology rather than in the philosophy of the constituting subject. By looking to these practices themselves, not what reflective activity brings them forward as possible solutions and by demonstrating that they both project and support a non-reflective comprehension of self and world, we can develop an analysis that makes ‘freedom’ a feature of the relationship

---

For instance, Timothy Raynor sees this ‘movement of problematization’ as the key link to Heidegger, whereas I see it as a break with the notion of preontological understanding and the critique of the constituting subject. Thus, while I focus on the ethical-spiritual transformation as the ground of ontology, Raynor focuses on philosophical activity and the attempt to grasp the historical a priori for a given domain of experience. See Timothy Rayner, *Foucault’s Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (NY Continuum, 2007).
of mutual constitution between subject and world, rather than a feature of the intellectual activity of the constituting subject.\textsuperscript{305} It is to the redescription of Foucault’s analysis of ethical-spiritual practices as the ground of an ontological analysis of freedom that I now turn.

\textsuperscript{305} In her work, Han hints at this possibility only to decline to take it up: “the idea that human practices themselves support a non-reflective comprehension of the self and the world, on the basis of which all reflective interpretations are elaborated, would allow Foucault to understand problematizations independently of the intellectual activity of the constituting subject, and thus, by definition, to analyze subjection through the practices themselves—‘techniques of the self’ and ‘techniques of domination’—indifferently.” (Han, \textit{Foucault’s Critical Project}, p.191).
In this chapter I will attempt to articulate the interrelationship between an ontological analysis of selfhood and care and a historical analysis of subjectivity by drawing out critical possibilities in Foucault’s late work in relation to Heidegger. In the previous chapter, I sought to demonstrate that Foucault’s analysis underwent significant modification in the period from roughly 1977 to 1982, passing through the three terminological equivocations of ‘conduct’, ‘experience’ and ‘thought’. We saw that rather than think of freedom as a feature or property of the subject, Foucault’s late position was more that it named a particular kind of situation or relationship to a determinant field or clearing of meaning and action. Yet ambiguities persist. In particular, it is not clear what makes this kind of relationship possible, what brings it into being and sustains it. At first read, Foucault’s answer appears to be that it is ‘thought’ which makes free relations possible: to oneself, to others, to the historically singular domains of experience that delimit the horizon of one’s intelligible world. The capacity for ‘thought’ permits the dislodging of the relatively solidified discursive effects that are constitutive of the forms of experience and their related modes of subjectivity. However, stopping there and leaving the analysis at this level leaves one with a position that, while perhaps not antithetical to Heidegger’s interrogation of ontology, at least stands in some direct tension to it. For while ‘thought’ is given different formulations in different parts of Foucault’s work (from a science or body of knowledge with discursive structural
regularities, to a hermeneutic unthought implicit within all action, to a movement of
problematization that seeks the historical a priori) the emphasis remains focused on a
relatively individualized and intellectualized concept, connoting an activity of the mind
that has an effect on organizing and ordering experience of the world. This implies at
least that Foucault bypasses or possibly even rejects Heidegger’s critique of Kant and,
more generally, the epistemological tradition. And yet Foucault repeatedly stated,
particularly in his late works, that Heidegger’s work—particularly Heidegger’s
interrogation of the relationship between freedom and truth—was of utmost importance
to him.

In the chapter that follows I develop an alternative reading in three basic moves.
First, I investigate what I will refer to as the ‘ontological commitments’ of Foucault’s
analysis of spirituality and care of the self. My claim is that his distinction between
philosophy and spirituality (and their related forms of activity) commits him to an
understanding of selfhood as ontologically grounded in a preexisting clearing or field of
meaning and action. This helps us further situate the discussion of the previous chapter
by placing Foucault’s earlier formulation of ‘thought’ in a roughly analogous relationship
to spiritual activities of care of the self as Heidegger’s notion of interpretation stands to
the prereflective practices of disclosure. Just as thought is ontologically grounded in care
of the self for Foucault, so too is interpretation grounded in prereflective practices of
world-disclosure for Heidegger. In the second part of the chapter I develop a working
distinction in Foucault’s writings between ‘selves’ and ‘subjects’, which is then used to
demonstrate linkages to Heidegger’s own account of selfhood and the critique of
transcendental subjectivity. Part three attempts to draw out the implications of the
previously sketched two-level ontological thesis (thought/care, reflective/pre-reflective, philosophic/spiritual, subjects/selves). Here I outline how the thesis of selfhood and care implicates a historical analysis of subjectivity in the West. Since both Heidegger and Foucault are committed to an understanding of selfhood and freedom as ontologically grounded in relations of care, a historical form of analysis that can account for the concealing of this ground is called for. Foucault’s history of subjectivity, with particular reference to Descartes and Kant, is read alongside Heidegger in light of this challenge.

**I: Spirituality and Care**

In this section I will attempt to draw out some of Foucault’s ontological commitments as evidenced by his late work (beginning with the 1981-82 lectures, *L’herméneutique du sujet*, to the end of his life in 1984) and connect these to the earlier discussion of Heidegger on selfhood and freedom. The aim here is three-fold: (1) to reconstruct a general ontological analysis of selfhood in late Foucault, (2) to use this analysis to resolve Foucault’s equivocation regarding the status of ‘thought’ as demonstrated in the previous chapter, and (3) to demonstrate the constructive relationship Foucault’s analysis of care of the self can have with Heidegger’s ontology of care. Central to my argument is that Foucault makes certain ontological commitments which he himself did not render fully explicit. I will summarize these here, proceed to elaborate upon each, and then situate them in relation to the previous discussion of Heidegger. These commitments include the following:

1. ‘Selfhood’ is not understandable through reference to either a substance metaphysics or a determinant set of formal properties that stand in a
transcendental relation to the field of action by the self. The self does not stand in a transcendent relation to the field of action (as a ‘subject’, over against objects and other subjects), but rather gains its very being through the practical activities it is always already engaged in, within an already existing world of entities which it does not itself constitute.

(2) Modification of the modes of practical involvement is, therefore, also self-modification.

(3) One of these activities of (self)modification is the work of thought (outlined in the previous chapter).

(4) The work of thought presupposes the existence of prereflective practices by which the world and the self (which become the object of problematization for thought) gain their existence in the first instance.

(5) These prereflective practices within a world are situated in an already existing context of meaning, referred to previously in Heidegger as a ‘clearing’. Such a clearing, furthermore, references not merely the existence of entities but also the ethical relatedness between things which one does not assign through choice, but rather amidst which one finds oneself. These relations of meaningful connectedness are what Heidegger called ‘Care’ [Sorge].

(6) The practice of freedom, therefore, is defined not by a disengagement or detachment of the self from its worldly activities (since such activities are the ontological ground of selfhood), but rather is a particular mode of engagement that discloses the latent possibilities within our basic
practices themselves for change and thus for self-transformation. It is by engaging in its worldly activities in a considered, intentional and careful manner that the self may disclose new possibilities and bring itself within the domain of these new possibilities, thus effecting a transformation of itself. Foucault refers to this mode of engagement as a ‘spiritual’ one, and the collection of such considered practices as the care of the self.

I.A. Spirituality

In order to further explicate and defend the above claims, we might take as our point of departure Foucault’s distinction between ‘philosophy’ and ‘spirituality’, introduced in the 1981-82 lectures *L’herméneutique du sujet*. Philosophy, in Foucault’s precise sense of the term here, refers to

\[
\text{cette forme de pensée qui s’interroge, non pas bien sûr sur ce qui est vrai et sur ce qui est faux, mais sur ce qui fait qu’il y a et qu’il peut y avoir du vrai et du faux. Appelons ‘philosophie’ la forme de pensée qui s’interroge sur ce qui permet au sujet d’avoir accès à la vérité, la forme de pensée qui tente de déterminer les conditions et les limites de l’accès du sujet à la vérité. (HS, 16)}^{306}
\]

We might highlight for our purposes here Foucault’s reference to philosophy as a ‘form of thought’ that takes as its central preoccupation the separation of truth from falsehood and an investigation of the conditions under which either arise (the possibility of verification). While recognizing that ‘philosophy’ has been a central part of the Western

---

306 “the form of thought that asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and whether or not we can separate the true and the false. We will call ‘philosophy’ the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject’s access to the truth.” (*Herm.*, 15)
cultural tradition since at least Socrates\textsuperscript{307}, and even acknowledging the centrality and importance of the injunction *gnōthi seauton* (know thyself), Foucault nevertheless insists on the greater importance of spirituality, at least to Classical Greek, Hellenistic, Roman and early Christian cultures. Each of these periods, in their own ways, had practices, doctrines and schools of philosophy of course. However, according to Foucault, during these periods the philosophic injunction to know thyself always appeared *within* the more general framework of the *epimeleia heautou* (care of oneself). Philosophy was a specific way of life and domain of practices, perhaps even an exceptional one. However it was taken up as merely

*une des formes, comme une des conséquences, comme une sorte d’application concrète, précise et particulière, de la règle générale: il faut que tu ’occupes de toi-même, il ne faut pas que tu ’oublies toi-même, il faut que tu prennes soin de toi-même. (HS, 6)*\textsuperscript{308}

These practices of care of the self understood the relationship between the ‘subject’ and ‘truth’ through a predominantly ‘spiritual’ framework. Foucault defines the term ‘spiritual’ thusly:

*on pourrait appeler ‘spiritualité’ la recherché, la pratique, l’expérience par lesquelles le sujet opera sur lui-même les transformations necessaires pour avoir accès à la vérité. On appellera alors ‘spiritualité’ l’ensemble de ces recherches, pratique et expériences que peuvent être les purifications, les ascèses, les renoncements, les conversions du regard, les modifications d’existence, etc., qui constituent, non pas pour la connaissance mais pour le sujet, pour l’être meme du sujet, le prix à payer pour avoir accès à la vérité. (HS-1, 16-17)*\textsuperscript{309}

\textsuperscript{307} Foucault goes on to further designate two main traditions within the modern philosophic tradition, at least insofar as the relationship between the subject and truth is concerned: the ‘analytics of truth’ (associated with Descartes, Kant and modern positivist science) and the pastoral tradition (associated with Christian confessional practices, psychoanalysis and modern hermeneutics).

\textsuperscript{308} “*one of the forms, one of the consequences, as a sort of concrete, precise, and particular application of the general rule: you must attend to yourself, you must not forget yourself, you must take care of yourself.” (Herm., 5)*

\textsuperscript{309} “*I think we could call ‘spirituality’ the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call ‘spirituality’ then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises,*
He goes on to list three main characteristics of spirituality in this sense:

[1] La spiritualité postule que la vérité n’est jamais donnée au sujet de plein
    doit… [2] Elle postule qu’il faut que le sujet se modifie, se transforme, se déplace,
    devienne, dans une certaine mesure et jusqu’à un certain point, autre que lui-
    même pour avoir droit à [l’]accès à la vérité… [3] Enfin, la spiritualité postule
    que l’accès à la vérité produit, lorsque, effectivement, cet accès a été ouvert, des
    effets qui sont, bien sûr, la conséquence de la démarche spirituelle faite pour
    l’atteindre, mais qui sont en même temps bien autre chose et bien plus: effets que
    j’appellerai ‘de retour’ de la vérité sur le sujet. (HS-1, 17)310

Spiritual practices are an answer to the practical question: what must be done to myself
such that I may become the kind of subject capable of apprehending the truth? What
modifications must be made to my being? How must I transform myself? Philosophic
activities (dialogue, contemplation, etc.) aim not so much at this preparatory work of self-
transformation as an interrogation of what is or isn’t actually true. They are not,
therefore, in competition or opposition to spiritual practices as Foucault defines them, but
rather refer to one domain of activities or way of living that one could engage in
secondarily to engaging in the spiritual.

The classic example of a spiritual practice in this sense (an example to which
Foucault repeatedly refers) is meditation. We might imagine a spiritual agent engaged in
meditative practices whose aim, for instance, is to centre the self, to make one more calm,
balanced, aware of the present moment and the like. An interlocutor might approach this
person and ask: ‘Why do you mediate? Is it true that meditation has this effect on the

renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but
for the subject, for the subject’s very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.” (HS-2, 15)

310 “[1] Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right… [2] It postulates that for
the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to
some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself… [3] Finally, spirituality postulates that once
access to the truth has really been opened up, it produces effects that are, of course, the consequence of the
spiritual approach taken in order to achieve this, but which at the same time are something quite different
and much more: effects which I will call ‘rebound’ (‘de retour’), effects of the truth on the subject.” (HS-2,
15-16).
person? Is the meditative life truly the best way of life?’ These kinds of questions are, of course, classic philosophic questions. They can be important, interesting, even unavoidable. However, such questions (at least from the standpoint of this ‘spiritual practitioner’) stand in a secondary and derivative relationship to actual meditation. Because the meditative practices are meant to affect my very being (make me a more calm, balanced, present-aware person), their effects are present even in the answering of the question (i.e., I respond in calm, balanced and present-aware manner). In other words, the search for knowledge about the self and the world can be undertaken in various ways and it is the spiritual activities on ourselves which make such ways of being possible.311

One of the implications of bringing to light the centrality of these spiritual practices for Foucault is that it helps reorient and resituate the previous discussion on ‘thought’. Relatively few commentators have adequately tied these two strands of Foucault’s thought together. Readers (often following from Foucault’s own equivocations) have frequently insisted that his analysis of freedom depends most centrally on the model of critique as the apprehension of the historical a priori: that there is a mode of thought that consists in the reaching out from within a singular form of experience to grasp the historical conditions of possibility of this as a problematic. They further argue that it is only through a history of such movements, a history of such

---

311 Note that in the discussion of ‘spirituality’ Foucault has not yet differentiated clearly between those activities done on the self by oneself, and those done on the self by others. If ‘spiritual’ practices are whatever must be done to the self such that it is transformed into a being capable of apprehending truth, this says nothing of whose evaluation it is of what needs to be done. Part of my reading here is to suggest that practices of care of the self (done to oneself) and disciplinary practices (done on oneself by others) are not different in kind. They are both ‘spiritual practices’ in the sense that they transform the very being of the subject such that they make a certain form of truth possible, even necessary. This fits into Foucault’s analysis of disciplinary practices as always requiring self-oriented practices, opening up a space of possibility for modification of these practices through the manner in which one conducts one’s conduct. See the discussion of conduct in the previous chapter.
problematiation, that the history of being can be constituted.\(^{312}\) Contrary to this reading, however, I suggest that insofar as this analysis remains focused on the reflective relationship of the self-constituting subject, it has not properly understood the ontological ground of such thought. To do this would require an analysis of freedom as a feature of the \(\varepsilon \theta \sigma \), or mutually constituting relationship between subjects and objects disclosed through those basic practices that comprise prevailing modes of practical involvement in the world which, in turn, make possible the self-reflective movement named by Foucault as ‘thought’. We would need to transpose the question from the level of philosophy, thought and the questioning of being to the level of spirituality and transformation of being. Placing attention on this second level of analysis requires looking to Foucault’s analysis of spirituality, not philosophy, since it is focused not on the interrogation of truth (what is or is not true, in this case vis-à-vis the historical \(a \, p r i o r i \)), but rather on the transformation of the very being of the subject of knowledge (what must be done to the self in order for it to enter into the games of truth at the present).

When we take as our point of departure the spiritual activities by which selves are constituted as subjects capable of apprehending truth we can see more clearly that, for Foucault as for Heidegger, the ontological ground of selfhood and freedom is the basic practices that continually disclose a self and its world within its already existing ethical relations. There are two large sets of implications that flow from these ontological commitments. The first is a stance on what counts as ethics. We saw above that Foucault defined as ‘spiritual practices’ those activities done on the self such as to transform the very being of the self, making it capable of apprehending a truth. It

\(^{312}\) This appears to be the central conclusion of Timothy Rayner’s study *Foucault’s Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (NY Continuum, 2007) and a serves as a point of contrast to the work presented here.
remains to be highlighted, however, that these transformative practices are themselves already ethical practices. Put succinctly, ethics refers to the intentional, self-directed exercise of spiritual practices. Ethics names the working out of the possibilities already latent within our activities (our walking, our eating, our sexual practices, etc.) in an intentional, conscious manner. Hence Foucault’s claim that while “Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics”, ethics is the “considered form” or the “conscious practice of freedom” (EW1, 284).313

This helps us develop Foucault away from the tradition of autonomy and towards ontology since, contrary to this formulation, the ‘working out’ of alternative possibilities in spiritual activities does not consist in a stepping back, a gesture of detachment or disengagement of the subject from its worldly relations. Such a thesis would presume a ‘remainder’ of the subject not itself embedded within already existing relationships and activities.314 The subject in this model is adequately prepared for the apprehension of truth, its proper self interests and thus free will, because it relies upon a feature of itself (the will, the categories of intuition, etc.) which are universal and unchanging. However, if one takes the above position vis-à-vis the ontology of selfhood, then a philosophy of ethics oriented around autonomy is untenable. Instead, an ethics that derives from the ontology of care must take as its point of departure a particularized mode of engagement

---

313 A French translation of this interview, modified by Foucault, can be found in DE, 1428-1450.
314 It is with respect to the possibility of such a ‘remainder’ or space outside of practical relations to which one does not consent, that Foucault differentiated his project from that of Habermas, for instance. Foucault argued that the insofar as Habermas subscribes to the notion that “there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint and without coercive effects”, his work is “utopian” (EW1, 298) In contrast to this, as James Tully has noted, “Foucault drew from his genealogies... that this regulative idea is yet another instance of the juridical presupposition that there is some place or procedure in which subjects are ‘sovereign’—free of power and autonomous—and in which they agree on the conditions of their subjection... To approach communicative games in accord with such a utopian regulative idea is to abstract oneself from what is really going on and the possibilities of concrete freedom within them, the only kind of freedom available to humans.” See Tully, ‘To think and act differently: Foucault’s four reciprocal objections to Habermas’ theory,’ in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds.) Foucault Contra Habermas (London: Sage, 1999), p.131.
or relationship in and to the activities of disclosure that constitute the self. When these activities take on an intentional or attentive quality, then they can be understood to be ethical practices. This is why for Foucault (as for Heidegger) freedom consists not in the autonomy of the subject vis-a-vis its worldly activities, but rather an engagement in those activities. This is, however, a particular kind of engagement. It is an engagement that is care-full. This is why, for instance, Foucault argues in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* that the particular practices of cultivation of the self (manifest in, say, practices of sexual austerity) were “dominé par le principe qu’il faut ‘prendre soin de soi-même’.” (*SS*, 61)315 This ‘taking-care’, however, was not understood along a corrective, or curative model, but as an attentive or ever-present cautiousness in whatever one is doing. The souci de soi consists in “une intensification du rapport à soi par lequel on se constitue comme sujet de ses actes.” (*SS*, 57-8)316 It is an engagement that is attentive to the ethopoetic nature of our activities, attentive to the fact that activities are themselves already imbued with meaning and that they are creative: disclosing the world in which we are always already thrown. The field or range of possibilities latent within any given set of practices is itself the ontological clearing which grounds the possibility of freedom. When this freedom (latent possibilities in a field of worldly practices) is engaged in an attentive, care-full manner, the self discloses itself as that which may bring forth a world that is simultaneously projected and actual, utopian and present.

If we think not of ‘free subjects’ and rather in terms of ‘free relations’, embodied by a mode of comportment with specific practices of cultivation, then we are offered quite a different picture from that of the model of autonomy which has come to prevail in

---

315 “dominated by the principle that says one must ‘take care of oneself’.” (*CS*, 43)
316 “an intensification of the relation to oneself by which one constituted oneself as the subject of one’s acts.” (*CS*, 41)
so much of practical philosophy since Kant. Many commentators have specifically
associated Foucault with this Kantian tradition, and there is considerable evidence in
Foucault for such a reading.\textsuperscript{317} However, I do not think that this is the only possible
reading. Particularly when read in relation to Heidegger, another Foucault emerges, one
whose work leads away from precisely this preoccupation with self-governance by the
will. For if the ‘will’ is the centre of the practices of care of the self, this implies that
there is a strong ontological distinction between the true, interior self and the merely
phenomenal self. It also implies a strong ontological distinction between the self and the
world of relations. We cultivate our ‘will’ (true, inner self) such that we can look at our
external determinations (passions, appetites, social relations, etc.) and properly determine
which are ‘our own projects’ and which are not ‘our own’.

The radical thing about Heidegger and Foucault is that they show us how the
strong distinction between ‘my own’ projects and those merely given to me by social
contexts is untenable. This is because, for both of them, such projects are not reducible
to the discrete, ‘choice-acts’ of agents on a field of possibilities. Such a view would miss
how the force and meaning of an act gains its standing because it appears within a
preexisting context, clearing or field. If this is the case, they argue, then freedom is not
the absence of constraint on the choice options of subjects, because the meaningfulness of
action requires limitation, restraint and resistance. As previous chapters have attempted
to show, action takes place within this space opened up between possibility and
constraint. This space Heidegger referred to as Spielraum; this action Foucault named as
conduite. This situated freedom then does not hinge on me being ontologically distinct
from my social world (self-sufficient), nor does it rely on me focusing on and cultivating

\textsuperscript{317} This is discussed in more detail below.
one feature of myself as the transcendent condition for agency within such relations (the will). Rather, freedom consists in an ‘ethical attitude’—what Heidegger would call a *mode* of being and what Foucault would call the *conduct* of our conduct—toward the field of practical involvement. This mode, they further suggest, reveals (a) my-self as the locus of a series of basic practices, and (b) the possibilities latent within them for thinking and acting otherwise. This ‘ethical attitude’ or mode of comportment is one of the senses in which we might say that we can ‘take care’ within our relations.

I.B. Care

As a further point of creative engagement between Heidegger and Foucault, we might look to their respective uses of the term ‘care’. Disambiguation of the term ‘care’ might be a helpful way of illuminating the distinction to be made between the approach taken by Heidegger and Foucault and that taken by theorists of autonomy and free-will. ‘Care’ in this context tends to denote (at least) three different things. First, care may refer to a special, willful relationship with an ethical component. This is the sense of the term I evoke when I say that I need to ‘take care’ of a child. Certain of Foucault’s feminist critics have, for instance, accused him of not paying enough attention to how much our subjectivity is formed by these kinds of relationships. Others have taken Heidegger to

---

318 There is a huge volume of literature on Foucault’s relationship to contemporary feminist philosophy. See in particular Diana Taylor and Karen Vintges (eds.) *Feminism and the Final Foucault* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), Susan Hekman (ed.) *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) and Caroline Ramazanoglu (ed.) *Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism* (NY: Routledge, 1993). A common criticism with respect to Foucault’s use of the term ‘care’ has been that his examples of ‘care of the self’ are usually limited to practices performed by elite males on themselves and, to the extent that others are involved, they tend to be used merely instrumentally. Examples of this criticism can be found in Amy Allen, “Foucault, Feminism and the Self” in Taylor and Vintges (eds.), *Ibid*, pp. 235-257.
task for similar reasons.\footnote{This is, for example, one of Levinas’ main critiques of Heidegger. See, for example, in \textit{Totality and Infinity} (Pittsburg: Dequesne UP, 1969), p.45, Levians writes that, “to affirm the priority of Being over existents is to already decide the essence of philosophy; it is to subordinate the relation with someone, who is an existent, (the ethical relation) to a relation with the Being of existents, which, impersonal, permits the apprehension, the domination of existents (a relationship of knowing), subordinates justice to freedom... In subordinating every relation with existents to the relation with Being the Heideggerian ontology affirms the primacy of freedom over ethics.”} These critics may or may not be right in their claims that Heidegger and Foucault lack an account of this kind of ‘willful caring for others.’ As a generalized critique of Heidegger’s concept of \textit{Sorge} or Foucault on \textit{souci}, however, these criticisms are misplaced. This particular kind of relationship is surely not what either thinker is trying to get at through their use of the term. This kind of relationship is not \textit{Sorge}, nor is it \textit{souci}, in the specific uses of those words within the works discussed here. Rather, it is closer to what Heidegger called \textit{Fürsorge} (often translated as solicitude).

Second, on the other end of the spectrum from the first sense of the term, we have the meaning evoked by Heidegger’s use of \textit{Sorge}. When Heidegger uses the term ‘care’ he means, at least in the first instance, something like ‘ontological involvement’. This just means that we are always already involved in a world that matters to us, in relation to other entities that are meaningful to us.\footnote{This is discussed in Chapter 2, Part IV, in relation to \textit{Mit-Sein}.} In fact, to go one step further, we can say that ‘the subject’ is these care-full or meaningful relations. In the sense of this ‘being in concern-full relations’, we cannot not care. In fact, we are care (as in, we are our concern-full relations). This is why, in the first instance, \textit{Sorge} is ontological and ‘pre-ethical’.

Finally, somewhere between these two positions is Foucault’s \textit{souci}. We can get at this third sense of the term, an admittedly creative use of Foucault’s \textit{souci de soi}, when we ask how we might realize \textit{Sorge} (above). The polysemic term ‘realize’ is perhaps...
helpful in the context of this discussion because it captures nicely two sides to souci de soi that Foucault purposefully wants to collapse together. To ‘realize’ something can mean both ‘to become aware of’ it and ‘to make it real’. I think that the souci de soi may be read as attempts to realize Sorge. That is, when we become aware of the fact that ‘we’ (subjects) are only insofar as we are embodied in concern-full relations with other entities and other selves, then we ‘make manifest’ this concern-full relation. When I say that we ‘become aware’, I don’t mean that we ‘think’ this in the traditional philosophical sense, grasp its essence conceptually in our minds. Rather, I mean that we attempt to weave these truths (logoi) into our very being, our mode of comportment (our bios) such that it is made manifest. Of course, to ‘realize’ oneself in this way is paradoxical. It amounts to saying that one must go to great effort to realize what they already are. Hence the centrality to both Heidegger and Foucault of the famous aphorism, inherited from the Greeks but prominent too in Nietzsche: “You must become what you are.”

They ‘realize’ Sorge in the two senses that they (a) make us understand, ground our knowledge of, care-full relations, and (b) they just are those relations, thus they make Sorge manifest. The division between ‘the world’ (i.e., concern-full relations) and the self falls apart at this point. Hence, for Heidegger, care [Sorge] in the ontological, worldly sense, and care-of-the-self are two sides to the same coin. In fact, he specifically states that “Der Ausdruck ‘Selbstsorge’... wäre eine Tautologie.” (SZ §41, 193).

---


322 “The expression ‘care for oneself’ [Selbstsorge]... would be a tautology.” (BTa §41, 237)
II. Of Selves and Subjects

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that Foucault’s distinction between philosophic and spiritual activities in *L’herméneutique du sujet* advanced two new lines of inquiry. The first was theoretical: an investigation of the general ontology of selfhood in relation to thought and care. I have attempted to read Foucault’s invocation of the language of care in a way that draws out the potential parallels to Heidegger.

There is, however, another line of inquiry: the historical. To get at this analysis, we might begin by asking how it is that this understanding of care and selfhood (with its related distinction between spiritual and philosophic practices) came to be concealed. If relations of care are primary to activities of thought, then how and when was this relationship concealed? To answer such a question requires a historical form of critical analysis.

This historical analysis takes as its point of departure a distinction between the terms ‘subject’ and ‘self’. The potential for reading Foucault’s *souci de soi* in terms of historical ontology has been covered over and misread partially because of his own slippage in the use of *sujet* and *soi* when speaking of care. Yet there is an important distinction at work here. The shift from late Medieval to early modern conceptions of selfhood marks a movement away from ‘selves’ as inseparable from their existence within a space of ethical concerns—a moral order—towards ‘subjects,’ whose primary orientation revolves around the inward search for indubitable premises that can then serve as the basis for the reconstruction of the activity of knowing itself.323 The term ‘subject’ thus evokes the Cartesian and Kantian traditions. It typically denotes an entity, distinct

---

323 The most comprehensive account of this transition remains Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989).
from mere ‘objects’, capable of reflection upon the world and itself. The capacity for reflective reason is the defining feature of this subject and the ground of the possibility of knowledge about the world beyond it. Commentators on Foucault have, paradoxically, condemned him for both attacking and unproblematically employing the ‘subject’. To take but one example, Linda Alcoff has written that,

[I]t is not simply the transcendental notion of subjectivity that Foucault is opposing, that is, a subject that is transhistorical and universal, but the notion of a subject as a being with a kind of primordial interiority that is autonomous or spontaneous in some ontological sense. This is why Foucault says that historicizing the subject is insufficient and that we must dispense with the constituent subject altogether... What his analysis undermines is the conceptualization of the very internal life of consciousness that has been taken, within the Cartesian tradition, to be the ultimate authority, a level of reality about which we can have more direct knowledge than any other and that generates a knowledge least open to interpretation and illusion.324

Alcoff speaks to the fact that Foucault’s work represents a fundamental challenge not only to the Cartesian notion of subjectivity as the ground of knowledge, but also the very notion of interiority so central to the hermeneutic tradition and what Foucault calls ‘pastoral power’ (and, we might add, the humanist notion of ‘mankind’).325 And Foucault himself makes this critique explicit. He states in no uncertain terms that

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 that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, 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. (EW3, 118)

But, we might note, Foucault’s critique here is more nuanced than it is normally taken to be. Foucault specifically targets the notion of the *constituent* subject. He critiques ‘subjectivity’ *per se* only if ‘subjectivity’ is taken to refer to an entity that stands in a position *transcendental* to a field of events, in its historical invariability. Amy Allen for one has, I think persuasively, pointed out that

Foucault’s aim is not to get rid of the concept of subjectivity altogether; instead, he sets aside any conception of the subject *as constituent* in order that he might better understand how the subject *is constituted* in a particular way in this particular cultural and historical milieu.  

While this may be true for the vast majority of Foucault’s writings, in particular the archaeological and genealogical studies, in his later writings Foucault does seem to persist in speaking of the ways in which subjects *constitute themselves*. This has led to the persistent critique that the question of constituent agency has haunted his analysis of freedom, for if it is not ‘the subject’ who acts and affects the course of history, then *who* or *what* is doing this acting?

In the same 1984 interview where Foucault declared Heidegger ‘the essential philosopher’ for him, he was asked to clarify this question of the subject. Since Foucault had specifically stated that he was interested in the ways in which subjects constitute themselves, and that this work of self-constitution proceeded through ‘thought’, it appeared to many as though a quasi-transcendental notion of consciousness had been reintroduced. The interviewer put this directly to Foucault, asking if he understood the subject to be “the condition of possibility of an experience”. Foucault responded unequivocally,

---

Note that Foucault specifically draws attention to the fact that the particular mode of
subjectivity derived from a host of practices of governance, languages of interpretation
and activities of self-constitution is only one mode amongst many. There is, in other
words, a range of possible forms of subjectivity that correspond to any particular
historical form of experience. Thus, for Foucault, while there may be ‘subjects’ in
relation to forms of experience (and forms of thought specific to these), there is nothing
we could call ‘the subject’ as a singular, transcendental condition for experience (nor an
unvariable mode of thought as the condition for this subject). Subjects still act, still have
agency in Foucault’s account, but they do so not by drawing upon a universal ‘core’ (a
will, ego, or cogito in its historical invariability). Rather, subjects exercise agency by
drawing upon the resources disclosed to them through the basic practices that constitute
the world of practical involvement. Forms of subjectivity are the outgrowth of the more
basic modes of practical involvement in which one finds oneself, but they are not
determined in some unmediated, direct way by these modes of engagement since, as I
argued previously, a clearing or field of possible meaning and action presupposes a
certain ‘play-space’ within which agency is actualized. The sharp distinction between
constituting and constituted subject breaks down at this point, but it does so through

327 “Absolutely not. The experience is the rationalization of a process, itself provisional, which results in a
subject, or rather in subjects. I would call subjectification the process through which results the
constitution of a subject, or more exactly, of a subjectivity which is obviously only one of the given
possibilities of organizing a consciousness of self.” (FL, 472)
recourse to the notion that the constitution of subjects brings with it capacities and possibilities of agency.\textsuperscript{328}

Further clarity on this question may be achieved by making a more careful distinction between ‘self’ and ‘subject’ than Foucault sometimes did. This also will help to illuminate connections to Heidegger’s own critique of the philosophy of the constituting subject. This distinction is already there in Foucault’s own work; it is just not always carefully delineated and consistently employed. Furthermore, the inattentiveness to this distinction on the part of commentators has led to some missed opportunities for bringing out the richness of Foucault’s work.\textsuperscript{329} We might parse out this distinction in three moves. First, let us reserve the term ‘subject’ for a special and

\textsuperscript{328} In this respect at least, my reading of Foucault differs from that of Paul Patton, for instance, who argues that Foucault’s work does presuppose “a ‘thin’ conception of the subject of thought and action: whatever else it may be, the human subject is a being endowed with certain capacities.” Patton, ‘Foucault’s subject of power,’ \textit{Political Theory Newsletter}, 6.1 (1994): 60-71, p.61. Later on in this same article, Patton draws upon the ‘Nietzschean’ foundations of Foucault’s work, arguing: “Modernity understood as an ethos of permanent self-criticism presupposes the existence of possible subjects of such activity. Such subjects will necessarily be free in the sense that their possibilities for action will include the capacity to undertake this self-critical activity... So long as human capacities do in fact include the power of individuals to act upon their own actions, we can see that Foucault’s conception of human being in terms of power enables us to distinguish between those exercises of power which inhibit and those which allow the self-directed use and development of human capacities. To the extent that individuals and groups acquire the meta-capacity for the autonomous exercise of certain of their own... capacities, they will inevitably be led to oppose forms of domination which prevent such activity.” Patton, p.68. My general point here is that while a reading of Foucault’s account of the subject and agency may begin with Nietzsche, it cannot avoid passing through Heidegger. This passing through Heidegger allows us to see that Foucault’s account of the subject does not rely upon an ‘ontology of the will’ \textit{à la Nietzsche} oriented towards “self-directed use and development of human capacities.” Rather, the force and significance of self- direction is disclosed \textit{historically} by a preexisting context or field of involvement, not determined universally or transcendentally through reference to the will. Hence, it is to this field of involvement that we must look for an analysis not only of the development of capacities to act but also, more importantly, the context of signification within which action can appear meaningfully at all. It asks: what can \textit{count} as action in this given field of possibilities, what can \textit{count} as self- directed action, and attempts to show how this significance is internally related to the development of the capacity to act. This is why, in the previous chapter, I attempted to demonstrate that Foucault’s use of the term ‘power’ underwent a modification away from the notion of \textit{capacity} towards one of \textit{relationship}.

\textsuperscript{329} Amy Allen, for example, specifically glosses over the distinction: “Although Foucault prefers to speak in his late work of a ‘self’ rather than a ‘subject,’ it seems clear that the notion of a self-constituting self presupposes some conception of a thinking subject who is capable of reflecting on what kind of self he or she wants to be and deliberating about the best way to become that sort of self, and it also presupposes some conception of an agent who is capable of acting in the world in such a way as to become the sort of self that he or she wants to be.” ‘The Anti-Subjectivist Hypothesis,’ p.118.
specific kind of entity with a determinate and invariable set of properties, the most important of which is a certain capacity for reflection on itself (self-consciousness). It is clear that Foucault wants to critique the idea of the subject in this sense, primarily by demonstrating that the supposedly determinant and invariable set of properties that define the subject (including self-reflective consciousness) are, in fact, historically variable and constituted by practices on and by the self. In other words, it is the ethical activities of (self)transformation—the *spiritual activities* on the self—that make a particular kind of subject possible, in a specific place, at a specific time. Thus, while there is no singular ‘subject’ with a fixed ahistorical set of properties, there are various *subjectivities*—ways of life in which selves take certain properties to be invariant, determinant and necessarily central to their identity. These selves draw upon resources from within the background field of practices with an unquestioning reliance. Insofar as we require such a background field, these properties are determinant in this sense: they define the horizon of the possible. As Foucault stated,

> There are two meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to. (EW3, 331)

We might say, to use slightly different vocabulary, that one is embedded within a certain form of subjectivity, not because it is imposed externally, but precisely because it is taken up by the subject herself as the limit of meaningful possibilities. One example of this from Foucault is his analysis of the formation of ‘sexual subjectivities’ in the West.

---

330 As James Tully puts this point, “a form of subjectivity is not a limit outside the experience of the subjects themselves; it is the limit of their experience as thinking subjects from the inside, the characteristic way they think through the forms of knowledge, relations of power, and practices of the self through which an aspect of their experience is brought to self-consciousness.” James Tully, ‘To think and act differently: Foucault’s four reciprocal objections to Habermas’ theory,’ in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds.) *Foucault Contra Habermas* (London: Sage, 1999), p.97.
whereby ‘sex-desire’ was taken up as a central, necessary and defining feature of identity and agency. The ‘hermeneutics of the subject’ refers to the various sciences to emerge that attempt to locate the most important or determining properties of subjectivity such that we may correspond our actions properly to who we ‘really’ are.\footnote{Vary few commentators have noticed, for example, the irony of the title \textit{L’herméneutique du sujet} for the 1981-82 lectures at the Collège de France. In fact, the lectures almost do not deal with the ‘hermeneutics of the subject’ at all. Rather, they study what came before the hermeneutics of the subject arose in the West: the care of the self.} So, to restate, while Foucault rejects the notion that there is a ‘subject’ with a fixed set of invariable properties, he does not reject the notion of historical forms of subjectivity, understandable not by reference to internal properties but rather through the various practices of subjectification which bring a solid form of subjectivity into being. In fact, the study of these modes of subjectification comprises the heart of Foucault’s work.\footnote{Foucault most famous (re)statement of his general project came in ‘The subject and power’, where he wrote, “I would like to say, first of all, what has been the goal of my work during the last twenty years. It has not been to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects... it is not power, but the subject, that is the general theme of my research.” (\textit{EW3}, 326-327)}

The second move in the differentiation between ‘subjects’ and ‘selves’ is to ask a historical question: has it always been the case, in all places, in all times, that people thought of themselves as having a set of determinant inner properties to which they must correspond? Foucault’s answer to this is clearly no. The point of studying classical Greek, Hellenic, Roman and early Christian practices of the self for Foucault is clearly not to bring them back.\footnote{Perhaps more so than Heidegger, Foucault managed to use classical texts without succumbing to a nostalgia or overly uncritical perspective on them. Some examples of this: “I am not looking for an alternative; you can’t find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people.” (\textit{EW1}, 256) ; “The Greek ethics of pleasure is linked to a virile society, to dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. All that is quite disgusting!” (\textit{EW1},258) ; “I think there is no exemplar value in a period that is not our period... it is not anything to get back to.” (\textit{EW1},259)} Rather, it is to throw into relief the specificity of the modern, Western notion of subjectivity and its relationship to both truth and agency or freedom.
The notion that humans were a special kind of entity whose determining property was an ahistorical form of reflective reasoning that provided the sufficient and necessary condition of possibility for knowledge of the world and, through this, free agency, is something that Foucault locates historically at the birth of the modern era. As we have already seen, according to Foucault, prior to the emergence of ‘the subject’ (even in its various modern forms: sexual, delinquent, etc.), premodern European civilizations understood the ground of truth and freedom not to be grounded first and foremost in the injunction: *know thyself*. Rather, before *know thyself* became the precondition for knowledge and free, ethical action, *care for thyself* was paramount. In the model of care of the self, one does not seek to determine the determinant properties of the ‘subject’. Instead, one seeks to bring oneself under a domain of already existing ethical relationships and, in so doing, to *become* a true, proper, free or ethical self. The ‘self’ here is only insofar as it corresponds to these already existing ethical relations. Thus, when Foucault speaks of *care* of the *self*, this is not to be understood as a minding of the ‘subject’, defined by its essential properties. Rather it is to be understood as an attentiveness to the immanence of the self in relation to its worldly activities: “Le soi auquel on a rapport n’est rien d’autre que le rapport lui-même... c’est en somme l’immanence, ou mieux l’adéquation ontologique du soi au rapport.” (*HS*, 514; emphasis added)

By suggesting above that this differentiation of ‘self’ from ‘subject’ in Foucault revealed certain ‘ontological commitments’, a possible line of constructive dialogue is opened up in relation to Heidegger. Specifically, we can see that the notion of the ‘self’

---

334 “the self with which one has the relationship is nothing other than the relationship itself... it is in short the immanence, or better, the ontological adequacy of the self to the relationship.” As quoted by Frédéric Gros, ‘Situation du cours,’ *Herm.*, 533 (all emphasis in original).
in Foucault functions somewhat like a historicized version of Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein}.

Heidegger’s tools and methods are certainly different, but the target is the same: to displace the modern, Western notion of ‘the subject’ as a substance with a set of determinant formal properties. In its place, they suggest, we might think of ourselves as ontological grounded in basic practices and relations of care. In \textit{Being and Time} Heidegger thought he could demonstrate the fallacy of subject-centered epistemology through recourse to transcendental hermeneutic phenomenology. By examining our everyday activities, the normal way in which we move through the world, Heidegger thought it possible to demonstrate the fact that we are not first and foremost detached ‘minds’ encountering a world. Rather, we are more basically (his term is ‘primordially’) simply \textit{in a world} of practical involvement—acting, coping seamlessly. Models that attempt to reconstruct the conditions of knowledge from the standpoint of a detached ‘subject’ will inevitably miss the mark therefore. For Heidegger, before we are ‘subjects’, before we are being-conscient, we are more simply (and, paradoxically, more fundamentally) being-there [\textit{Da-sein}].

Heidegger began developing this thesis in his earliest works\textsuperscript{336}, refined it considerably in \textit{Being and Time},\textsuperscript{337} and maintained it even after ‘the turn’.\textsuperscript{338} What

\textsuperscript{335} Of course, in saying ‘before’ we are subjects we are \textit{Da-sein}, ‘before’ is not to be understood in the chronological sense. Foucault’s analysis helps to demonstrate that the modes of subjectification are ‘always already’ there, in their historical specificity. What Heidegger is pointing out is that we are not reducible to, or even primarily understandable through, our subjection.

\textsuperscript{336} For instance, as early as his 1923 lectures at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger claimed “Das Dasein ist keine Sache wie ein Stück Holz; nicht so etwas wie eine Pflanze; es besteht auch nicht aus Erlebnissen, noch weniger ist es das Subjekt (Ich) gegenüber dem Objekt (nicht Ich).” (\textit{GA} 63, 47). Translation: “Dasein is not a ‘thing’ like a piece of wood nor such a thing as a plant—nor does it consist of experiences, and still less is it a subject (an ego) standing over against objects (which are not the ego).” (\textit{OHF}, 37)

\textsuperscript{337} “Eine ihrer ersten Aufgaben wird es sein zu erweisen, daß der Ansatz eines zunächst gegebenen Ich und Subjekts den phänomenalen Bestand des Daseins von Grund aus verfehlt. Jede Idee von ‘Subjekt’ macht noch—falls sie nicht durch eine vorgängige ontologische Grundbestimmung geläutert ist—den Ansatz des subjectum (\textit{hupokeimenon} ontologisch) mit, so lebhaft man sich auch ontisch gegen die ‘Seelensubstanz’ oder die ‘Verdinglichung des Bewußtseins’ zur Wehr setzen mag.” (\textit{SZ} §10, 46) Translation: “One of our
changed was less the thesis than his methods of analysis. Heidegger came to see that, ironically, his use of transcendental hermeneutic phenomenology to demonstrate the priority of fundamental ontology to epistemology actually reinscribed some of the very problems he was attempting to break free of. Specifically, he lacked an account of how ‘the subject’ came to be paramount (an analysis of the processes of subjectification in the west) and how, on his own account, a critique of the subject required a complementary mode of historical analysis. In this sense, by pursuing the thread of his own work, Heidegger came to modify his own position in a manner analogous to the slow transformation we observed in Foucault’s writings in the previous chapter. Along a parallel track, Foucault too attempts to displace the philosophy of the constituting subject through recourse to the historical a priori and the notion of thought-as-problematization. Like Heidegger, however, this ironically committed him to a position that reinforced certain features of this very problematic. A more complete analysis would proceed at the level of the ontological involvement of Dasein, not the self-constitution of the subject through ‘thought’. Ontological involvement is what makes this ‘thought’ possible and Foucault’s analysis of the activities of care appears to be his attempt at just such a study.

When we read Foucault alongside Heidegger with an eye to revealing similarities in what I have been calling their ‘ontological commitments’, I think we can state the following: Both thinkers argue that our primary experience of the world and of ourselves is not mediated by consciousness but is, instead, derived from a practical relationship

---

338 See especially N4, Chapter 15 (‘The dominance of the subject in the modern age’) to the end.
339 This is discussed in more detail in the conclusion to Chapter 3.
within an already existing world. Basic technological-practical activities prefigure conceptualization and thematization. This foundation leads in two directions with respect to the question of freedom. On the one hand, it leads to an analysis of our relations within the clearing. When we investigate this, we see that both Heidegger and Foucault see a particular clearing or field of practical involvement not as a determinant ruled-based set of patterns, but as a sphere of possibilities, given as it is to a ‘play-space’ within which agency is realized. ‘Freedom’ in this sense is a space of possibilities within which we act. On the other hand, it also leads to an analysis of our relations to the clearing. On this level, we are asking a question of how might we relate to the modes of practical involvement in which we find ourselves, how we take up our possibilities. ‘Freedom’ in this sense is a ‘right relation’ to the world, one which discloses those possibilities referred to in the first part.

On first read, these might appear to be two discrete categories or ways of thinking about freedom. However, as I have attempted to slowly unfold through the preceding discussion, they are in fact mutually interrelated. Heidegger attempted to show the interrelationship between these two senses in his late work when he spoke of ‘freedom’ as a relationship to the clearing that preserved the freedom of the clearing. For instance, in ‘Building, Dwelling, Thinking,’ he writes,

Das Wort Friede meint das Freie, das Frye, und fry bedeutet: bewahrt vor Schaden und Bedrohung, bewahrt— vor… d.h. geschont. Freien bedeutet eigentlich schonen… Wohnen, zum Frieden gebracht sein, heißt: eingefriedet bleiben in das Frye, d.h. in das Freie, das jegliches in sein Wesen schont.” (GA 7, 150-151)340

340 “The word for peace, Friede, means the free, das Frye; and fry means preserved from harm and danger, preserved from something, safeguarded. To free actually means to spare... To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its essence.” (BW, 351)
What this suggests is that our mode of being (peaceful, careful, etc.) is related to our possibilities of being (the range or ‘free sphere’ of thought and action).

But perhaps the clearest formulation of this interrelation is Foucault’s use of the term *conduite*. The previous discussion of this term discussed how it emerged from within a host of other considerations with regards to the ‘arts of government’ and ‘governmentality’. Read now in the light of Heidegger’s reflections, however, we can see the true philosophical originality and import of Foucault’s terms. ‘Conduct’ understood as a noun, refers us to the first sense of freedom mentioned above—as the range of possibilities disclosed to us from within a clearing or field. It is what we can do. However, our ‘conduct’ understood as a verb, refers us to the second sense of freedom above—the relationship to our field of practical involvement. It is how we do what we do. Thus, with Foucault’s suggestion that a history of the ‘conduct of conduct’ can be written—a study of the modes by which selves comport themselves within their basic practices disclosed by a field of practical involvement—he is offering us the clearest articulation to date of how an *historical ontology of freedom* might proceed.

### III: The History of Subjectivity

If it is the case, however, that the ontological thesis regarding selfhood and practical involvement is convincing, then this thesis rebounds upon itself, seeking an analysis of its own (historical) conditions of possibility. In other words, the articulations of spirituality, care and selfhood given above demand on their own terms to be taken up as *practical interventions* in a world with its own determination conditions, limitations and possibilities. In reading both Heidegger and Foucault under the sign of ‘historical

---

341 In Chapter Five.
ontology’, I have been arguing that their approaches consistently attempt to reveal the interrelatedness of (1) claims to knowledge about the world, (2) the disclosure of a domain of entities about which it is possible to make such claims and (3) an ethical positioning of the subject of knowledge in relation to the world thus interpreted. Together, these three features comprise a ‘clearing’ or ‘field’ of practical involvement—what is sometimes called a ‘practical system’.\(^{342}\) In arguing that a ‘fundamental’ ontology—which proceeds to sketch out the general form of this analysis—unfolds on its own terms into a ‘historical’ ontology, I have suggested that there is a continuity (though not a total commensurability) leading from Heidegger to Foucault and that the historical ontology of freedom must proceed not from the reconstruction of the universal conditions of knowledge required for the rational determination of action, but rather through an analysis of the specific configurations of knowledge, techniques of objectification, ethics given over through a practical field of possibilities. Finally, I have suggested, this requires relating to other philosophical projects not merely as a collection of arguments about the world, but as a set of practical relations within the world and to oneself. This history remains, however, forever incomplete. This is partially due to the fact that the scope of the study would be nearly infinitely wide but also, and more importantly, because the redescription and rearticulation of the past tradition out of which this historical ontology derives is itself an ongoing practical task. Yet even if the task is

\(^{342}\) Foucault speaks in this idiom most explicitly in ‘Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?’ where he defined an ‘ensemble pratique’ as “domaine homogène de référence”, defined not by “les représentations que les hommes se donnent d’eux-mêmes” (a history of ideas or self-consciousness), nor “les condition qui les déterminent sans qu’ils le sachent” (a structuralist historical materialism, for instance), but “les formes de rationalité qui organisent les manières de faire... et la liberté avec laquelle ils agissent dans ces systèmes pratiques.” (\(DE2\), 1395; emphasis added) Translation: “a homogeneous domain of reference”; “the representations that men give of themselves”; “the conditions that determine them without their knowledge”; “the forms of rationality that organize their ways of doing things... and the freedom with which they act within these practical systems.” (\(EW1\), 317; emphasis added)
never complete, we are nevertheless driven back to the outset of this discussion. I will, therefore, attempt to demonstrate how the analysis of freedom in relation to historical ontology requires a subsequent repositioning in relation to its own past, its own alternatives.

From this new vantage point, the emergent preoccupation with attunement and ethopoetic transformation of the self in Heidegger and Foucault is not merely an alternative account of freedom, running alongside that of autonomy and the philosophy of the transcendental subject. Rather, the historical ontology of attunement and spiritual transformation stands in an internal relationship to the tradition of autonomy and transcendental subjectivity in the West. It does so in two senses. First, historical ontology can offer an alternative reading of the history of autonomy and transcendental subjectivity, one that sees this tradition as also always engaged in spiritual transformation of selves (into subjects) and things (into objects), but as one that attempts to conceal this very transformation. From this standpoint, the history of subjectivity in the West is a history of a spiritual tradition that conceals its own activities of ethical (self)transformation. Through this lens, we might read not only Heidegger’s account of the rise of modern technology as an ethopoetic revealing that conceals itself, but also Foucault’s account of disciplinary society as a complementary form of analysis focused on the modes of subjectification (rather than Heidegger’s emphasis on modes of objectification). Secondly, historical ontology is internally related to the model of the autonomous, transcendental subject because it understands this not merely to be an alternative theoretical ‘model’, but rather precisely as the world out of which historical ontology emerges. In this sense, the practice of articulating historical ontology and

343 I am referring here to the brief historical sketch given in Chapter 1.
spiritual transformation is not merely attempting to describe the world alternatively; it is itself an attempt at a spiritual transformation from within the prevailing mode. This is why Heidegger and Foucault both situate their own accounts of freedom within the general rubric established by Descartes and Kant. To merely assert one could ‘leap over’ the epistemological model, to simply ‘do otherwise’ without first preparing the ground, would be to return to an understanding of the subject as ‘detachable’ from its worldly conditions.344 As a way of organizing this resituated relationship to the history of subjectivity in the West, we will look exclusively at the similarities between Heidegger and Foucault with respect to their analyses of Descartes and Kant.

Reading Foucault and Heidegger’s historical ontology through this lens of spiritual transformation reveals new insights and new potential for alternative interpretations. In this section, I will examine Foucault’s ‘double reading’ of Descartes and Kant with an eye to elucidating parallels to Heidegger’s history of Being in the West. The aim here is to demonstrate how Foucault’s history of subjectivity might complement and complete Heidegger’s own attempts to historically situate his ontological analysis. In this I am returning to a theme first presented in Chapter 3. There I suggested, following from work by Béatrice Han, that a quasi-Heideggerian form of historical analysis might be possible if it were to posit that there are some modifications “at the ontic level that are so considerable that they act on the very ontological structure of our existence and modify it.”345 These modifications would not be modifications on the level of

344 This appears to be part of Heidegger’s (arguably unbalanced) characterization of Nietzsche.
345 Béatrice Han, ‘Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003),
consciousness, but would rather unfold on the level of practical involvement. Hence the corresponding form of historical analysis would proceed through an analysis of the *basic practices* that make up the prevailing modes of revealing in a given epoch. I will read Foucault’s treatment of Descartes and Kant not as traditional interpretations of their ‘philosophy’, but rather as interpretations of their ‘spirituality’. By this I mean that Foucault takes up these two important figures in the Western tradition as exemplars in transformations of the practical relationship to the self. In so doing, he gives a concrete demonstration of the forms of making—the practical knowledges, or *technē*—through which modern ‘man’ comes to know itself through a fashioning of itself. This complements Heidegger’s analysis of the history of Being in the west as unfolding through *technē* not only by providing more concrete historical specification of these transformations, but also by providing a new axis of analysis: that of the relationship of self to self.  

---

p.151. Han gives as an example of such a modification the fact that “the Western understanding of time has been radically modified by Judaism, and later by Christianity,” *Ibid.*

346 Foucault specifically states that his analysis of the changing relationship of self to self might be read as a another axis in the analysis of forms of *technē* in the west. He states that “According to some suggestions by Habermas, it seems, one can identify three major types of techniques in human societies: the techniques that allow one to produce, to transform and to manipulate things; the techniques which allow one to use sign systems; and the techniques that allow one to direct [conduire] the behaviour of individuals, to impose certain wills on them, and to submit them to certain ends or objectives. That is to say, there are techniques of production, techniques of signification, and techniques of domination.

However, I became more and more aware that there is in all societies, I think, in all societies whatever they are, another type of techniques: techniques which permit individuals to perform, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves, modify themselves, and reach a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power, and so on. Let’s call this kind of techniques a techniques or technology of the self.” *Subjectivity and Truth, 153.*

We have already seen (in the previous chapter) that Foucault sees this as an extension of Heidegger’s analysis of *technē*, only ‘turned around’: “For Heidegger, it was through an increasing obsession with *technē* as the only way to arrive at an understanding of objects that the West lost touch with Being. Let’s turn the question around and ask which techniques and practices form the Western concept of the subject, giving it its characteristic split of truth and error, freedom and constraint.” M. Foucault, ‘About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self,’ *RC*, p.161, ft.4.
III.A. ‘Le moment cartésian’

A key transition in the history of subjectivity in the West according to Foucault is what he calls ‘le moment cartésian.’ The general shift in subjectivity that Descartes exemplifies revolves around a new relationship between the ‘subject’ and ‘truth’ such that truth is, at least in principle, accessible without modification or effect on the subject itself. Truth becomes something which is knowable to any subject regardless of the transformation of the subject itself through practices. Foucault calls the point at which this transformed relationship became possible the ‘le moment cartésian’—not to single out Descartes as a singular, historical event to which all such analytics of truth and pastoral power can be traced, but rather as an exemplary instance of a general transformation in European thought and cultural practices. Specifically, the Cartesian moment is the moment which

a placé à l’origine, au point de départ de la démarche philosophique, l’évidence—l’évidence telle qu’elle apparaît, c’est-à-dire telle qu’elle se donne, telle qu’elle se donne effectivement à la conscience, sans aucun doute possible… De plus, en plaçant l’évidence de l’existence propre du sujet au principe même de l’accès à l’être, c’était bien cette connaissance de soi-même (non plus sous la forme de l’épreuve de l’évidence mais sous la forme de l’indubitabilité de mon existence comme sujet) qui faisait du ‘connais-toi toi-même’ un accès fondamental à la vérité. (HS-I, 16)

This reading of Descartes actually began years earlier for Foucault, developed in his 1972 exchange with Derrida over the interpretation offered in Histoire de la Folie. In his response to Derrida, ‘Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu’, Foucault suggested that Descartes needed to be subjected to a ‘double reading’. On the one hand, we might read a text such

347 “placed self-evidence (l’évidence) at the origin, the point of departure of the philosophical approach—self-evidence as it appears, that is to say as it is given, as it is actually given to consciousness without any possible doubt… What’s more, by putting the self-evidence of the subject’s own existence at the very source of access to being, this knowledge of oneself (no longer in the form of the test of self-evidence, but in the form of the impossibility of doubting my existence as subject) made the ‘know yourself’ into a fundamental means of access to truth.” (HS-2, 14)
as *The Meditations* as an example of Cartesian reasoning. From this standpoint, we investigate the text as an instance of the Cartesian *cogito* at work: as a subject who, through the power of his own reasoning alone, grasps truth through a careful application of the methods of knowing. Beginning from first premises, ‘clear and distinct ideas’, the author of *The Meditations* merely follows proper logic to a set of conclusions via proper syllogisms. In Foucault’s parlance, this is a modern ‘philosophical’ reading of *The Meditations*.

There is, however, another reading. The ‘double reading’ of *The Meditations* consists in also investigating them as a *practice of self-constitution*, or a spiritual exercise. This second reading

> se réfère moins à l’organisation significante du texte qu’à la série des événements (actes, effets, qualifications) que porte avec elle la pratique discursive de la méditation; il s’agit des modifications du sujet par l’exercice même du discours... *(DE1, 1125; emphasis added)*

Recalling the original sense and spirit of the term ‘meditations’, Foucault reminds Derrida that

> Une ‘méditation’ au contraire produit, comme autant d’événements discursifs, des énoncés nouveaux qui emportent avec eux une série de modifications du sujet énonçant... Dans la méditation, le sujet est sans cesse altéré par son propre mouvement... Bref, la méditation implique un sujet mobile et modifiable par l’effet même des événements discursifs qui se produisent. *(DE1, 1125)*

So, rather than focus exclusively on what Descartes said, on the status of the text and its argument as a truth claim, Foucault also inquires into *how* this person and this text *gain status* as sufficient grounds for possible truth. In other words, he is interested in what

---

348 “it refers less to the signifying organization of the text than to the series of events (acts, effects, qualifications) which the discursive practice of meditation carries with it: it is a question of the modifications of the subject by the very exercise of discourse.” *(EW2, 405; emphasis added)*

349 “[A] ‘meditation’ produces, as so many discursive events, new utterances that carry with them a series of modifications of the enunciating subject... In meditation, the subject is ceaselessly altered by his own movement... In short, meditation implies a mobile subject modified through the effect of the discursive events that take place.” *(EW2, 405-6)*
needs to be done, performed on the self, such that it can be taken seriously as a self-contained sufficient entity capable of apprehending truth through the exercise of its own faculties, independent of external aid or modification. This process of becoming a ‘subject’ of knowledge and truth, requires first, Foucault argues, a set of spiritual exercises or ‘meditations’.

The final step in Foucault’s reading is to ask what is required of the reader at the level of spiritual transformation such that the text and this subject (Descartes) can appear as self-contained possible grounds of truth. Hence, he suggests, we can read *The Meditations* not only as a logical system or argument to follow, but also as

un ensemble de modifications formant *exercise*, que chaque lecteur doit effectuer, par lesquelles chaque lecteur doit être affecté, s’il veut être à son tour le sujet énonçant, pour son propre compte, cette vérité. (*DE1*, 1126)

Hence, Foucault’s reply to Derrida is about much more than just how to read Descartes. It is also in part about how ‘we readers’ constitute ourselves in different ways through the particular kinds of interpretations we offer. Derrida, Foucault charges, not only fails to read Descartes in relation to those spiritual practices which were the precondition for the supposed access to truth offered in *The Meditations*, but also that in so doing, Derrida is actively constituting himself as a ‘subject’ capable of accessing truth without prior or ongoing spiritual transformation. Hence, from Foucault’s standpoint, in this sense at least, Derrida is quite Cartesian.³⁵¹ This analysis of Descartes as a transformative figure,

---

³⁵⁰ “a set of modifications forming an *exercise*, which each reader must effect, by which each reader must be affected, if he in turn wants to be the subject enunciating this truth on his own behalf.” (*EW2*, 406)

³⁵¹ Foucault calls him “le représentant le plus décisif” of the Cartesian system insofar as he continues the “réduction des pratiques discursives aux traces textuelles; élimination des événements qui s’y produisent pour ne retenir que des marques pour une lecture; inventions de voix derrière les textes pour n’avoir pas à analyser les modes d’implication du sujet dans le discours; assignation de l’originaire comme dit et non dit dans le texte pour ne pas replacer les pratiques discursives dans le champ des transformations où elles s’effectuent.” (*DE1*, 1135) Translation: “the most decisive modern representative... the reduction of discursive practices to textual traces; the elision of the events produced therein and the retention only of
but one whose very form of self-transformation is a concealing one, remained largely consistent throughout his late writings.  

III.B. Kant, humanism and teleological anthropology

Although Descartes clearly looms large for both Heidegger and Foucault with respect to questions of truth, epistemology and subjectivity, with respect to the question of freedom and its relation to ethics, Kant remains the primary point of reference. In Chapter 1, I sketched out how the Kantian understanding of freedom might be taken up as an alternative theoretical model or discourse to that of situated freedom. Now, however, it is incumbent upon us to re-read Kant under the rubric of historical ontology itself. That is to say, to take up the Kantian philosophy of freedom not merely as a theory, but as a practical relationship to the world. Just as Foucault subjected Descartes to a ‘double reading’, so too he suggests we may take up Kant in two registers.

On the one hand, Kant formalizes the critical philosophy of the enlightenment—the attempt to define the transcendental *a priori* conditions of possible experience and, through them, subject (moral) action to rational determination. In this way, he stands as the single most important contributor to thinking about freedom in terms of a philosophy of transcendental subjectivity. It was this more standard reading of Kant that was offered in Chapter 1. However, another reading is also possible, one which is hopefully more

---

marks for a reading: the invention of voices behind texts to avoid having to analyze the modes of implication of the subject in discourses; the assigning of the originary as said and unsaid in the text to avoid placing discursive practices in the field of transformations where they are carried out.” (*EW2*, 416)

352 In the 1982 Interview, ‘On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,’ Foucault reiterated: “[w]e must not forget that Descartes wrote ‘meditations’—and meditations are a practice of the self. But the extraordinary thing in Descartes’s texts is that he succeeded in substituting a subject as founder of practices of knowledge for a subject constituted through practices of the self.” (*EW2*, 278) The original interview was conducted in English, but a French translation, checked and corrected by Foucault, is also available: *DE2*, 1202-1230.
accessible to us having run through Heidegger and Foucault. On this second reading, Kant is also understood as the initiator of a certain ‘ontology of actuality’, defined less by a formal transcendental argument and more by a certain ethical attitude or relationship to oneself enabled by a specific spiritual exercise or *askesis*.\(^{353}\)

In this ‘second reading’ what makes Kant so significant to the historical ontology of freedom is not so much his insights into epistemology— his attempts to secure the truth of the power of reason through a demonstration of its limits.\(^{354}\) Rather, what is revealed through a second order reading of Kant is that the truth of this relationship (between freedom and obligation) is revealed only through a more basic *ethical* or *spiritual transformation* of the subject of knowledge. The task of Kantian practical philosophy, viewed from this vantage, is not merely to describe and defend this transformation, but rather to aid in its realization.

As we have seen, according to Foucault (and, we might add, Heidegger) the Cartesian moment represents the emergence of a certain practical relationship to the world characteristic of the modern West that takes as its point of departure the notion that the self-certainty of the subject (i.e., of self-consciousness as such) is the foundation of all knowledge. Within this model, the acquisition of knowledge is not linked to a specific ethical mode of being in the world, an *ēthos*. Under Foucault’s reading, however, Kant

\(^{353}\) For a detailed, careful explication of Kant’s work along these lines—a reading to which my own is indebted—see Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001). There, particularly in Chapter 6, Hunter subjects Kant to an analysis not unlike Foucault’s reading of Descartes. That is, he reads Kant’s moral philosophy not only in terms of an argument, as an instance of the exercise of reason, but rather as comprised by various steps that “form the architecture of an elaborate spiritual exercise, designed to lead the reader through ascending levels of speculative self-questioning and self-purification.” Hunter, p. 293. Other readings that proceed along these lines include Edward F. McGushin, *Foucault’s Askēsis* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 2007), Chapter 8, and; Andrew Cuttofello, *Discipline and Critique: Kant, Poststructuralism, and the Politics of Resistance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

\(^{354}\) Discussed in Chapter 1 as the move to ‘transcendentalize finitude’: redefine the limits of human reason positively as the condition of possibility for knowledge as such.
reintroduces this ethical dimension to knowledge acquisition. Kant is, therefore, working *within* the Cartesian subject-centred philosophical tradition, but he also works *against* it in important ways. In a 1983 interview, Foucault stated:

> After Descartes, we have a subject of knowledge which poses for Kant the problem of knowing the relationship between the subject of ethics and that of knowledge. There was much debate in the Enlightenment as to whether these two subjects were completely different or not. Kant’s solution was to find a universal subject that, to the extent it was universal, could be the subject of knowledge, but which demanded, nonetheless, an ethical attitude—precisely the relationship to the self which Kant proposes in *The Critique of Practical Reason*. (*EW1*, 279)

To this, interviewers Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow asked, “You mean that once Descartes cut scientific rationality loose from ethics, Kant reintroduced ethics as an applied form of procedural rationality?” Foucault responded,

> Right. Kant says, ‘I must recognize myself as universal subject, that is, I must constitute myself in each of my actions as a universal subject by conforming to universal rules.’ The old questions were reinterpreted: How can I constitute myself as a subject of ethics? Recognize myself as such? Are ascetic exercises needed? Or simply this Kantian relationship to the universal which makes me ethical by conforming to practical reason? Thus Kant introduces one more way in our tradition whereby the self is not merely given but is constituted in relation to itself as subject. (*EW1*, 279)

So what specifically is this ‘ethical attitude’ and this ‘action of self-constitution’ that Kant offers? For this, we must look to Foucault’s most famous statement on the topic: the essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’

> According to Foucault, one of the most important things Kant did was provoke a new kind of questioning about the present. While acknowledging that “ce n’est certainement pas la première fois que la pensée philosophique cherche à refléchir sur son propre présent” (*DE2*, 1382), Foucault nevertheless suggests that the Kant’s reflections on the Enlightenment are unique insofar as they define the *Aufklärung* as an *Ausgang*, an

---

355 “it was certainly not the first time that philosophic thought had sought to reflect on its own present.” (*EW1*, 304)
exit. Unlike other reflections on modernity that Kant offers, in which the present is defined in relation to “questions d’origine ou qu’il définisse la finalité intérieure d’un processus historique” (DE2, 1385)\(^{356}\) (the mode of teleological freedom outlined at the beginning of this work), here Foucault claims that Kant grasps his present without assigning it a predefined role “à partir d’une totalité ou d’un achèvement futur.” (DE2, 1385)\(^{357}\) So if the Aufklärung can be defined as an exit and an event in the present, but without making this event part of a large historical anthropology, what kind of ‘exit’ is it? In a word, it is an exit from ‘immaturity’ (personal and collective). The exit from immaturity involves, for Kant, the realization that submission to the proper use of reason is different from mere obedience to authority. What is at stake for Kant is the transformation from naïve to mature moral consciousness. Submission to reason involves, for the mature subject, the realization of its objective interests. It cannot, therefore, be seen as an obstacle to the true freedom of the subject.

Of course, Foucault does not praise this specific aspect of Kantian practical philosophy. Indeed, he finds much that is problematic here, for two main reasons. First, as numerous other commentators have noted, Kant’s ethic is bound up with the emergence of the juridical subject and the model of law-governance that Foucault seeks to problematize and de-naturalize. In his demonstration of the continuing import of the juridical form of subjectivity to neo-Kantian practical philosophy, James Tully usefully outlines the main contours of this model:

The juridical subject is the individual or collective subject of rights and duties. Juridical subjects coordinate their moral and political action by means of laws or norms. The laws are legitimate or just in so far as they are universal and based on the agreement or consent of those who subject themselves to them. The juridical

\(^{356}\) “questions of origin or defines the internal teleology of a historical process.” (EW1, 305)

\(^{357}\) “on the basis of a totality or of a future achievement.” (EW1, 305)
practical systems are the legal and political institutions of European societies in which power is exercised through the law in a primarily prohibitive manner by and over agents who are constituted as law-governed bearers of rights and duties. Juridical forms of knowledge are law-centred theoretical, jurisprudential and legislative codes and their traditions of interpretation, modes of application, systems of punishment and theories of revolution against unjust constitutions.\textsuperscript{358}

Kant, in his construal of freedom as self-governance as the basis for proper moral action, sets up an antinomy between autonomous and heteronomous legislation that undergirds much of the juridical form of subjectivity. Since Kant defines maturity in terms of a relationship of governance whereby one can only be said to be acting morally if one is acting according to a law given to oneself, he drives the movement towards a form of subjectivity in which discrete individuals interact with each other through self-authorized contract and consent. The threat to one’s own autonomy comes, therefore, from a recognition of the deep (we might say, ontological) interdependence of subjects and their surrounding context of meaningful thought and action. The notion that free agency is actualized through the mobilization of resources disclosed to the subject, but not of their own choosing or legislation, is antithetical to such a model. The juridical model of subjectivity reinforces a longstanding contest against obstacles to ‘pure’ self-determination, including non-rational features of the self such as the passions and the body.\textsuperscript{359} As Andrew Cutrofello argues,

\textsuperscript{358} Tully, ‘To think and act differently,’ p.125.
\textsuperscript{359} Béatrice Han has also noted this connection and related it back to Descartes: “The history of objectification and subjectification in the West thus developed along two increasingly divergent lines: On the one hand, the knowing subject emancipated itself from spiritual demands, first though the framework of Cartesianism, then through Kantian philosophy. On the other, the idea of a necessary transformation of the self through a relation to the truth was first taken up by Christian pastoralism, then by the disciplines... and finally by the internalisation of techniques of subjectivation particular to bio-power. Therefore, to the growing epistemologisation of philosophy chronologically corresponds the progressive disciplinarisation of the constitution of the self.” Béatrice Han, ‘The Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity.’ in Gary Gutting (ed.), \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Foucault}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), p.188
Kant subscribes to the juridical model of power, and he fashions critique on a juridical model so that it might serve as an instrument for resisting domination. Hence, the political stakes of critique consist primarily in a battle of laws. At the same time, Kant recognizes the emergence of disciplinary power, which, however, he continues to construe on a juridical model. As the key to critical philosophy’s struggle with disciplinary power, Kant invokes a new form of discipline. Thus the juridical battle between power (heteronomy) and critique (autonomy) becomes a struggle between two sorts of discipline—a discipline of domination (heteronomy) versus a discipline of resistance (autonomy).360

The aspect of this model that Foucault takes issue with is not, of course, a relationship of discipline over oneself per se. As much of his later writings attest, he is deeply interested in the various ways in which subjects come to work on themselves through practices of self-discipline. Foucault’s central argument, as Tully puts it, is that the juridical model, by focusing our attention on the problem of the mode of subjection and the elaboration of a universal code, causes us, as both theorists and participants in juridical games, to overlook processes of subjectivisation in politics and, in an analogous fashion, practices of ethical self-formation in morality, precisely what a ‘critical’ philosophy should concentrate on.361

In this manner, Kant’s challenge—that we discipline ourselves in order to produce subjects who experience their freedom in terms of universal laws of reason—represents both an extension and a concealing of the thesis regarding spirituality and care. It is an extension of it insofar as Kant advocates an ethical transformation of the subject as the precondition for the apprehension of knowledge about the world. It is, however, also a concealing of this very move through a positing of the necessary and universal structure of this relationship—one found, not created through the relationship to the self itself. Hence, Foucault writes,

> Alors il me semble qu’on a ça chez Descartes d’une façon très claire, avex, ci vous voulez, chez Kant le tour de spire supplémentaire qui consiste à dire: ce que nous ne sommes pas capables de connaître fait précisément la structure même du sujet connaissant, qui fait que nous ne pouvons pas le connaître. Et par

360 Andrew Cutrofello, *Discipline and Critique*, p.33.
361 Tully, ‘To think and act differently,’ p.126.
conséquent l’idée d’une certaine transformation spirituelle du sujet, qui lui
donnerait enfin accès à quelque chose à quoi précisément il n’a pas accès pour l’instant, est chimérique et paradoxale. Alors la liquidation de ce qu’on pourrait appeler la condition de spiritualité pour l’accès à la vérité, cette liquidation se fait avec Descartes et avec Kant; Kant et Descartes me paraissent les deux grands moments. (HS, 183)³⁶²

Thus, for Kant a certain form of governance—of the self over itself—takes its place as the necessary and universal condition for ethics. This particular relationship then serves to anchor the second major aspect of the Kantian model to which Foucault objects:³⁶³ the notion of a developmental anthropology whereby Kant attempts to reconcile the empirical and transcendental (or anthropological and critical) sides of his project through recourse to the notion of a purposiveness in nature that guides rationalization in human history. As Foucault writes,

Through these different practices—psychological, medical, penitential, educational—a certain idea or model of humanity was developed, and now this idea of man has become normative, self-evident and is supposed to be universal. Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation... What I am afraid of about humanism is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom. (TS, 15)

Yet, despite all this, there is something Foucault clearly finds interesting and important in Kant’s reflections on the Aufklärung. This is not the Kant involved in the critical project of delimiting the necessary bounds of reason as such. Nor is it the Kant who proposes a disciplinary model of the juridical subject, wedded to a teleological

³⁶² “It seems to me that this is very clear in Descartes, with, if you like, the supplementary twist in Kant, which consists in saying that what we cannot know is precisely the structure itself of the knowing subject, which means that we cannot know the subject. Consequently, the idea of a certain spiritual transformation of the subject, which finally gives him access to something to which precisely he does not have access at the moment, is chimerical and paradoxical. So the liquidation of what could be called the conditions of spirituality for access to the truth is produced with Descartes and Kant; Kant and Descartes seem to me to be the two major moments.” (Herm., 190)
³⁶³ Heidegger, of course, also objects to this humanistic anthropology. This is discussed in the conclusion to Chapter 3 and in more detail below.
anthropology leading through the stages of history from savagery to civilization. Instead, the Kant that Foucault is most impressed and interested in is the one who suggests that an 
ethical attitude of attentiveness to the present moment is the precondition for access to truth and, in so doing, reintroduces a dimension of spirituality to critical philosophy. This is the limited sense in which we can see that Foucault’s work is still ‘Kantian’. As Ian Hacking writes,

Among the radical novelties of Kant was the notion that we construct our ethical position. Kant said we do this by recourse to reason, but the innovation is not reason but construction. Kant taught that the only way the moral law can be moral as [sic] if we make it. Foucault’s historicism combined with that notion of constructing morality leads one away from the letter and the law of Kant, but curiously preserves Kant’s spirit. Kant founded his metaphysics of ethics on the idea of freedom. That was another innovation.364

When we look to his reading of ‘What is Enlightenment?’ we can see that there are two main aspects to this innovation that Foucault finds promising. First, although Kant’s work does get taken up in the direction of the disciplinary model of the juridical subject under the rubric of universal reason, Kant himself acknowledges that the apprehension of this reason requires a prior ethical transformation of the subject of knowledge. As such, Kant reintroduces the spiritual dimension Foucault seeks to trace through the Western history of subjectivity.365 Foucault writes that, “à partir de Kant, je crois que, là encore, on verrait que les structures de la spiritualité n’ont pas disparu, ni de la réflexion

365 We might even say that, when Kant speaks of the courage demanded by the heraldic Aude sapere, he is invoking the moral virtue required to submit oneself to reason: the ethical stance one would have to take—have courage!—in order to become a universal subject of reason. Another example of this can be found in Kant reflections on the French Revolution. For him, the true hope of progress can be seen not so much in the fact of the revolutionary action, but in the affective response of the onlookers. He writes that “they openly express universal yet disinterested sympathy... this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a sympathy which borders almost on enthusiasm... true enthusiasm is always directed exclusively towards the ideal.” Immanuel Kant, ‘The Contest of the Faculties,’ in Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), pp.182-183. To put this in the idiom we are using here, Kant applauds the necessary ethical-spiritual transformation of the subjects in question as a necessary feature of the philosophical enterprise to which he is contributing.
philosophique ni peut-être même du savoir.” (*HS*, 29) We might see an example of this if we look closely at Kant’s own words. According to Kant, the Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is *not lack of understanding*, but lack of *resolution and courage* to use it without the guidance of another.\(^{367}\)

Immaturity is not a state of cognitive deficiency—a lack of understanding or knowledge. Rather it is a different practical relationship to oneself, the state in which *one does not fashion oneself* as a subject of universal reason. In other words, an ethical relationship to oneself is the precondition of the development of understanding, thus reintroducing the question of the relationship between the epistemological subject and the ethical subject, which Descartes had foreclosed.

The second important feature Foucault extracts from this text requires a certain historicizing of Kant. Foucault does not think that we can constitute ourselves as moral agents through recourse to an ahistorical property of the subject—the will, universal reason, or the like. Rather, we constitute ourselves as moral agents by drawing upon resources disclosed to us in the particular historical and cultural location of the present. This requires therefore, a particular attentiveness to *what is possible in the present*. This attentive questioning of our actual condition is therefore the precondition for an ethical self-fashioning. This is the second major innovation Foucault draws from Kant. When Kant attempts to respond to the present moment as he understands it, Foucault notes that the very preoccupation with the present is *itself an ethics*. Kant reveals in his writings

\(^{366}\) “from Kant on, I believe that there again, one will see that the *structures of spirituality have not disappeared*, neither from philosophical reflection nor perhaps from knowledge.” (*Herm.*, 28) Foucault goes on to cite Hegel, Schelling, Nietzsche, the Husserl of the *Crisis*, and Heidegger as inheritors to this tradition.

\(^{367}\) Immanuel Kant, ‘What is Enlightenment?,’ in *Political Writings*, p.54.
here a deep concern for *what is actually happening*. This is, for Foucault, itself an important and unique feature of the modern critical *ēthos*.

Thus, what Foucault finds most important about the Enlightenment is this attitude, this “*mode de relation à l’égard de l’actualité*” (*DE2*, 1387).\footnote{“mode of relating to contemporary reality.” (*EW1*, 309)} Contrary to those who interpret Foucault as merely advocating a willful destruction, or overcoming of all tradition, he specifically and cautiously refers to this *ēthos* as one in which

\begin{quote}
la haute valeur de présent est indissociable de l’acharnement à l’imaginer, à l’imaginer autrement qu’il n’est et à le transformer *non pas en le détruisant, mais en le captant dans ce qu’il est*... [vers] un exercice où l’extrême attention au réal est confrontée à la pratique d’une liberté qui tout à la fois respecte ce réel et le viole. (*DE2*, 1389; emphasis added)\footnote{“the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it *not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is*... [through] an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practices of a liberty that *simultaneously respects this reality and violates it*.” (*EW1*, 311)}
\end{quote}

What I have suggested throughout this chapter is that one meaningful vocabulary for such a relationship to the present is that of Care. As outlined above, this is not a ‘taking care’ in the sense of a healing relationship—returning us back to some originary state of pure, healthy, unalienated being. Rather, it is a relationship of care in the sense of an attentiveness to what *actually is* and through this, to the latent possibilities for transformation from within. It is, in this sense, a relationship of care that is a practice of freedom.

Foucault clearly sees in Kant, just as in Descartes, potential for precisely this kind of opening up to new possibilities. In order to achieve this, he reads the two thinkers against themselves, demonstrating how they foreclose certain possibilities and, often despite themselves, open up new ones. A guiding thread to this narrative has been Foucault’s analysis of how Descartes and Kant *constitute themselves* through their
respective projects and, in so doing, contribute to the ongoing history of spiritual
transformation in the West. We draw resources from these past moments in order to
reverse against them, demonstrating their strengths in certain respects precisely through a
simultaneous revealing of their limitations. Of course, this involves taking up the
question of limits differently from the critical tradition as Kant construed it. Certainly,
Kantian philosophy is a reflection on limits, on finitude. However, for Kant this limit is
taken up through the experience of the necessary and the obligatory. For Foucault,
however, the reflection on limits is experienced not only in submission to necessity, but
rather, more fundamentally in transgressive possibilities engendered by the experience.
In brief, through the projection of possibilities beyond the limit. Hence the relationship
Foucault attempts to attentively draw between truth and freedom.

Mais si la question kantienne était de savoir quelles limites la connaissance doit
renoncer à franchir, il me semble que la question critique, aujourd’hui, doit être
retournée en question positive: dans ce qui nous est donné comme universel,
nécessaire, obligatoire, quelle est la part de ce qui est singulier, contingent et dû à
des contraintes arbitraires. Il s’agit en somme de transformer la critique exercée
dans la forme de la limitation nécessaire en une critique pratique dans la forme du
franchissement possible. (DE2, 1393)370

In short then, we might say, along with Amy Allen, that what Foucault calls for is
a critique of critique, which means not only a criticism of Kant’s project for the
way in which it closes off the opening in thought that it had created but also a
critique in the Kantian sense of the term—that is, an interrogation of the limits
and conditions of possibility of that which Kant himself took as his own starting
point, namely the transcendental subject itself.371

370 “But if the Kantian question was that of knowing [savoir] what limits knowledge [connaissance] must
renounce exceeding, it seems to me that the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one:
In what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular,
contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point, in brief, is to transform the critique
conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible
transgression.” (EWI, 315; translation modified)

198, p.189.
By focusing on Descartes and Kant as central figures in the transformation of Western philosophy, Foucault brings his analysis into closer conversation with Heidegger’s history of Being in the West. He does so, furthermore, by focusing on the ways in which Descartes and Kant not only helped to bring forth a new relationship between truth and subjectivity in the West—one that took ‘the subject’ as a self-contained, complete entity requiring no modification in order to access the truth of the world—but also, perhaps paradoxically, concealed the spiritual exercises required to bring this new relationship into being. Foucault’s Descartes is someone who inaugurates a new form of subjectivity in the West, but does so precisely by concealing the spiritual transformation required to inaugurate such a ‘subject’. When Foucault claims that with Descartes, “evidence is substituted for ascesis” (*EW1*, 279), he is (intentionally or not) echoing a major theme in Heidegger. Heidegger and Foucault both effectively argue that the emergence of Cartesian epistemology and Kantian practical philosophy must not be critiqued merely as ‘philosophic mistakes’. Rather, they represent a *world of practical involvement* with mutually implicating practices of subjectification and objectification. Furthermore, what is particularly problematic about this mode of revealing is not that it is ‘wrong’ or does not correspond to reality. Rather, the issue at stake is that this is a mode of revealing that conceals its own conditions of appearance, thus prevailing over other possibilities and concealing the latent possibilities of transformation from within. Foucault has two major fears about the transformations exemplified by Descartes and Kant—both of which are very much in line with Heidegger’s own analysis of certain pathologies in the modern, Western relationship to Being. First, though very subtly, Foucault suggests that the ‘Cartesian moment’ permits a new form of instrumental
relationship to the ‘objects’ of the world. Just as Heidegger claims truth in the post
Cartesian era gets reduced to objectification and repetition, Foucault also argues that

la connaissance de type cartésien ne pourra pas être définie comme l’accès à la
vérité: mais ça sera la connaissance d’un domaine d’objets. Alors là, si vous
soulez, la notion de connaissance de l’objet vient se substituer à la notion d’accès
à la vérité. (HS, 184)\textsuperscript{372}

Elsewhere, again echoing a Heideggerian theme, Foucault comments that the changes
Descartes inaugurated “make possible the institutionalization of modern science.” (EW1,
279) Unfortunately, although Foucault does express some reservations about the
prevalence of this mode of objectification, he does not elect to take the question up in any
substantial way.

More substantively, however, is Foucault’s second worry: that the Kantian legacy
has been taken up in a one-sided or uneven manner. He suggests that post-Kantian
practical philosophy betrays an almost singular preoccupation with the critical project of
circumscribing the limits of knowledge and the correlated relationship of self-governance
as the precondition for freedom at the expense of an ‘ontology of actuality’ grounded in
an ethical attitude of attentiveness and care.

The domain of knowledge and action brought into being by the Cartesian and
Kantian moments is, for Heidegger and Foucault, uniquely problematic because it
purports to delimit the entire horizon of the intelligible (truth \textit{as such}) and is thus
inherently totalizing. For Foucault, this means that the relationship to truth, while not
\textit{actually} disconnected to the ethical and spiritual transformations of the self, are presented
as such:

\textsuperscript{372} “the Cartesian type of knowledge cannot be defined as access to the truth, but is knowledge
\textit{(connaissance)} of a domain of objects. So, if you like, the notion of knowledge of the object is substituted
for the notion of access to the truth.” (Herm., 191)
The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. It suffices that the relationship to the self reveals to me the obvious truth of what I see for me to apprehend the truth definitively. Thus, I can be immoral and know the truth. I believe this is an idea that, more or less explicitly, was rejected by all previous culture. Before Descartes, one could not be impure, immoral, and know the truth. With Descartes, direct evidence is enough. After Descartes, we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge. This change makes possible the institutionalization of modern science. (EWI, 279)

The analysis of a Cartesian and Kantian form of subjectivity that conceals the conditions of its own appearance, transforms our very relationship to truth, and is enabling of a totalizing form of (Western) science, is all very much in line with Heidegger’s own critique. The passage above stands in a complementary and constructive relationship to Heidegger’s own characterization of Descartes, in whose work “der Anspruch des Menschen auf einen von ihm selbst gefundenen und gesicherten Grund der Wahrheit…Jetzt hieß Freisein, daß der Mensch an die Stelle der für alle Wahrheit maßgebenden Heilsgewißheit eine solche Gewißheit setzt, kraft deren er und in der er sich seiner selbst gewiè wird als des Seienden, das dergestalt sich selbst auf sich stellt.” (GA 6.2, 125-126)373 This permits humanity to enter into a new era in which freedom is no longer understood as a right relation to the world, but rather asserts the “die neue Freiheit als die ihrer selbst sichere Selbstgesetzgebung” (GA 6.2, 129)374

For Heidegger, this is represented in the emergence of our understanding of reality as a ‘world-picture’. The ontology of the ‘world-picture’ that has come to dominate in the Western world is, furthermore, the outgrowth of a more basic technological involvement, a set of activities that both transform ‘things’ into ‘objects’

373 “man’s claim to a ground of truth [is] found and secured by man himself…To be free now means that, in place of the certitude of salvation, which was the standard for all truth, man posits the kind of certitude by virtue of which and in which he becomes certain of himself as the being that thus founds itself on itself.” (N 4, 97).
374 “new freedom of self-assured self-legislation.” (N 4, 100)
and, in so doing, also serve to constitute ‘Dasein’ (our located, particularized being-in-involvement within a world) as a ‘subject’ (the locus of a set of determinant properties). We might say, to transpose Foucault’s language into Heidegger—that this technological involvement is a *spiritual* one, insofar as it reconstitutes the very being of the subject of knowledge such that a new relationship to truth is made possible. Cartesian and Kantian philosophy merely represents the philosophical expression of a mode of being or relationship in the world, one in which reality is an object represented to the knowing subject.

This stance towards the world has a two-fold set of consequences. *Philosophically*, it produces a host of problems beyond which we struggle to see. The attempt to found knowledge upon this model of representation leads, ironically, to the very anxiety over relativism and subjectivism that this model was meant to lay to rest. This relates back to the problems of (self)concealment (discussed in Chapter 3) which Heidegger seeks to dissolve rather than solve through reminder of the ontological preconditions for such problems. Unfortunately, when it comes to the most general level of analysis—the emergence of ‘the subject’ as the organizing point for questions of truth and freedom in Western thought—Heidegger provides little detail of its historical emergence (something Foucault is most helpful for). Nevertheless, it is clear that Heidegger identifies a similar problematic here. Since from within the Cartesian-Kantian ‘world-picture’, only that which can be represented to the cognizing subject as indubitable counts as being, ethical relationships to the world are reducible to questions

---

375 For instance, Heidegger argues at one point that the “scandal of philosophy” is not that a final proof for the Kantian distinction between transcendental and empirical forms of selfhood—between what is ‘in me’ and what is ‘outside of me’ has yet to be given, but rather that “solche Beweise immer wieder erwartet und ersucht werden.” (SZ §43, 205) Translation: “such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.” (BTa §43, 249)
of epistemology. If epistemological questions cannot be definitively settled in the face of radical skepticism, then radical nihilism threatens not only knowledge claims but also our ethical relationship to the world itself (i.e., the world loses meaning and ethical import).

Practically, Heidegger and Foucault both suggest that the Cartesian-Kantian model leads to a relentless totalization of one (technological) mode of social, spatial and temporal ordering. If reality can be reduced to a ‘world-picture’, then it can be objectified. ‘World-pictures’ can then be compared and contrasted in terms of their adequacy. This leads, for Heidegger, to the demand that only the most adequate picture as an absolute set of criteria be employed to filter and order our relationship to the world. He writes,

Die für das Wesen der Neuzeit entscheidende Verschränkung der beiden Vorgänge, daß die Welt zum Bild und der Mensch zum Subjectum wird, wirft zugleich ein Licht auf den im ersten Anschein fast widersinnigen Grundvorgang der neuzzeitlichen Geschichte. Je umfassender nämlich und durchgreifender die Welt als eroberte zur Verfügung steht, je objektiver das Objekt erscheint, um so subjektiver, d.h. vordringlicher erhebt sich das Subjectum, um so unaufhaltsamer wandelt sich die Welt-Betrachtung und Welt-Lehre zu einer Lehre vom Menschen, zur Anthropologie. (GA 5, 93)

Hence Heidegger’s claim that the mode of revealing that is modern technology—the mode of revealing intertwined with the age of the ‘world-picture’—demands a challenging-forth, an ordering of things and selves which must be exclusive and total. The tragic irony of this is that this mode of revealing further masks itself qua mode of revealing, thus covering over Dasein’s special relationship to its world. Instead of taking up this mode of revealing as a working out of possibilities latent within the world—as a

---

376 “The interweaving of these two processes—that the world becomes picture and man the subject—which is decisive for the essence of modernity illuminates the founding process of modern history, a process that, at first sight seems almost nonsensical. The process, namely, whereby the more completely and comprehensively the world, as conquered, stands at man’s disposal, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively (i.e., peremptorily does the subjectum rise up, and all the more inexorably, too, do observations and teachings about the world transform themselves into a doctrine of man, into an anthropology.” (OBT, 70)
creative, care-taking activity—the modern technological subject purports to merely be responding to the objective reality of the world as such. Thus, even while most actively marshalling reality, the modern subject denies this as an active engagement. Hence Heidegger’s claim that the truly insidious thing about modern technology is not what it does to the world (though he clearly thinks this is disastrous as well) but rather that the way in which it does this serves to cover over the very horizon of historically transmitted practices that make such a mode of being possible. Modern technology conceals itself by concealing the background practices that are its historical condition of possibility. He states,

\[ \text{Das Wesende der Technik bedriht das Entbergen, droht mit der Möglichkeit, daß alles Entbergen im Bestellen aufgeht und alles sich nur in der Unverborgenheit des Bestandes darstellt. (GA 7, 34)}^{377} \]

In a similar manner, Foucault’s concern with the rise of ‘disciplinary society’ is not that it engages in this or that activity which one could consider bad (though, again, there may also be concern on this level). Rather, Foucault’s concern is that the particular way in which the human sciences’ purported capacity to define and describe the truth about the subject masks the background micro-practices that made such a ‘subject’ possible in the first place. Thus, the human sciences conceal their historic relationship to institutions of power that are not merely reflective of modes of subjectivity, but also productive—what Foucault called the “political technology of the body.” For Foucault, just as for Heidegger, the ultimate expression of this ordering/concealing is the constitution of ‘Man’ as the locus of teleological humanism and the philosophy of the constituting subject.

---

377 “The essential unfolding of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealment of standing-reserve.” (BW, 339)
In the preceding work, I have referred repeatedly to Heidegger and Foucault as indispensable resources towards thinking about freedom in terms of historical ontology. In this final chapter, I would like to recast this discussion slightly. I want first to briefly summarize the main points of the preceding work and offer a more explicit defense of the term ‘historical ontology’ in reference to this project. I will then conclude by discussing some of the remaining points of tension between the respective philosophical projects undertaken by Heidegger and Foucault and what this general set of questions might contribute to certain issues within contemporary political theory.

I. Overview

I have argued in the preceding work that, amongst other things, Heidegger and Foucault offer a renewed formulation (seen in an earlier form with Marx) of the notion that our primary experience of the world is not one mediated by consciousness, but is instead a practical relation. Heidegger postulates that the philosophy of consciousness has historically produced a series of pseudo-problems which subsequent philosophers have struggled to get clear of precisely because they begin from within this general

---

rubric. These problems are at once epistemological and practical. Heidegger counsels us to ‘remember’ the more basic, or primordial, relationship we have to the world: one in which we simply are already involved in a seamless field of equipment and other selves. The everyday encounter with these entities is governed by already existing ethical relations which we do not as a matter of course ‘assign’ through intentional acts of the will or mind. In his early work, particularly *Being and Time*, he suggested that a general analysis of the conditions of this more basic practical involvement could be sketched—an investigation of the experience of Being—which he called ‘fundamental ontology’.

In later works, however, Heidegger began to modify this position. This began as an extension of the project undertaken in *Being and Time*, overlapping with themes contained therein, but also increasingly diverging from fundamental ontology. I attempted to comment on two features of this modification in previous chapters (particularly Chapter Three). The first of these was Heidegger’s theory of history (or lack thereof) and his understanding of freedom. One of the claims made within *Being and Time* was that our basic mode of engagement in a world (the forms of practical involvement) is conditioned by ‘historicality’. This meant, then, that our forms of practical involvement are not only interpretations (implicitly or explicitly held) of what sorts of entities exist within the world, and a certain ethical relatedness between them (referred to as ‘Care’), but also that there is an internal relationship between these first two basic features and our experience and understanding of time. Heidegger argued that the modes of practical involvement are situated *temporally*, meaning that they could only be understood or experienced through a presumptive grasping of the horizon of time (i.e., that to grasp the meaning of our world was already to draw upon an understanding of the
past and to project into the future). This position has been useful, for instance, for arguing against certain approaches within analytic philosophy that posit the possibility of analyzing the meaning of concepts independent of their function within an ongoing activity that is historically and temporally situated. The general feature of our understanding and experience of the world as temporally situated Heidegger called ‘historicality’.

This thesis posed immediate questions, however, for Heidegger’s previous work\footnote{For instance, it begs the question of whether ‘fundamental ontology’ is itself temporally and historically situated and, if so, in what ways.} and for attempts to move his work into new areas of study, particularly social and political theory. For if it is the case that our basic experience of the world is temporally and historically situated, then this begs the question of how this experience is modified over time and thus implicates agency. It is one thing to claim that our understanding and experience of Being exists within the horizon of an experience of time; it is another to show how this is so by reference to the practices that sustain this understanding, to demonstrate what practical-political implications flow from this, and to reveal how this understanding has changed historically. In other words, a complementary form of historical analysis—particularly one that can account for agency in the transformation of our ‘understanding of Being’—is needed. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger hinted that a certain ethical positioning of the subject was required for a grasping of the practical possibilities of transforming the present. He called this specific ethical positioning ‘Resoluteness’ and said that it entailed “das erschließende Entwerfen und Bestimmen der jeweiligen faktischen Möglichkeit.” (SZ §60, 298)\footnote{“the disclosive projection and determination of what is factically possible at the time.” (BTa §60, 345)} As stated thus, Resoluteness implies an attentiveness or awareness of the present. However (as noted in
Chapter Three), he provided little detail on what precisely was ‘factically possible at the time’, nor any criteria for determining this.

We saw that early attempts were made to provide just such an account, first by Marcuse and later (in his own distinct way) by Sartre. These two hypothesized that the ontological thesis presented in Being and Time could be wedded to a Marxist historiography. The transformation in our modes of practical involvement proceeded along the lines of the collective self-realization of a class and the increasing self-directedness of human engagement in the world. Thus, while human experience of the world might in the first instance be a practical relationship of being-in, this could and should become increasingly mediated by conscious reflection, not through the effort of individual subjects, but through the transformation of social relations thus effecting the self-awareness of entire classes as the agents of history. This modified Marxist thesis effaced the ‘epistemological indeterminacy’ of the ontological thesis, was wedded to a historical teleological of collective action, and ultimately was seen as too foreign to Heidegger’s original formulation to serve as a complementary form of social and historical analysis.\footnote{For a study of the French reception to this form of analysis, see Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975).}

What remained, however, was the general question of the conditions of transformation of the modes of practical involvement. Through a reading of Heidegger’s middle writings (Chapter Three), I suggested that the kernel of such an analysis was already present in his own work on freedom. This is best represented by the notion of Spielraum. Through elaboration of this concept, I argued that Heidegger understands the appearance of a particular field of thought and action in the present as non-determinant,
that is, not reducible to a set of autonomous ‘rules’ or ‘structures’ that merely act on agents and which are unthinkingly replicated into the future. Instead, a field or clearing is described as a ‘sphere of possibilities’, characterized by a ‘play-space’ within which agents think and act. This helps provide the basis for a Heideggerian analysis of historical change by insisting upon the possibilities of immanent transformation of a specific field or clearing.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I argued that the development of a social theory that attends to the actual practices of immanent transformation given over by a sphere or range of possibilities in a particular historical period is given its fullest treatment in the work of Michel Foucault and that this work, particularly during his ‘late writings’ can be connected back to Heidegger. There, I argued that although Foucault began with a quasi-structuralist account—one that appeared to affirm precisely the notion that societal norms and rules of conduct operate directly on agents without reflection—his final position was significantly modified. Also contrary to his earlier writings, working within the ‘war-model’, Foucault’s final position was not that historical change was driven by external resistance towards a particular domain of knowledge and power. Rather, his late work attempted to show how agents engage in a critical transformation of the present by taking up certain latent possibilities given over by a field of action and thought into which they are ‘thrown’. Thus, such agents work both within and against the prevailing field. Finally, Foucault drew attention to a specific subset of activities whose aim was not the resistance to, or overthrow of, a domain of knowledge and power, but rather more basically the development of the ethical sensitivity within the latent possibilities of the already existing world. In Chapter Six, I recast this souci de soi as attempts to ‘realize’
Care [Sorge]. He further suggested that it was through an analysis of these slow modifications in the ‘conduct of one’s conduct’ that a history of the experience of ‘Being’ can be written. This is not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in specific fields of learning, but an historical analysis of the “the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience.” (UP-2, 6-7; emphasis added)\(^{382}\) The connection drawn between the attentive, ethical conduct of oneself as the (historical) condition of possibility for the transformation of our experience of the world is the justification I take for redescribing the general analysis here as a ‘historical ontology of freedom’.

II. Historical Ontology

It is, of course, more common to link Foucault to the French tradition of historical epistemology, inherited directed from Gaston Bachelard, Georges Canguilhem and, in a different manner, Louis Althusser. This tradition, carried on today by key Foucault-inspired philosophers such as Ian Hacking and Arnold Davidson, has sought an investigation of the conditions of appearance of a certain object of analysis, the basis on which a claim or concept could gain status as a possible candidate for truth or error. They have been concerned with how a general domain of rationality is formed such that certain concepts can gain status as stable epistemic objects. In so doing, they have also demonstrated that an analysis of a present concept or claim cannot be undertaken without an account of its previous uses and trajectory. Hence, their work with traditional categories of epistemology has always been both historical and critical.

\(^{382}\) It is important to note, however, that this statement was not Foucault’s final word on the question of the ‘experience of Being’. The claims here are contextualized and elaborated upon in the previous chapter.
Foucault certainly belongs in this camp—indeed he is one of the most important and original contributors to this form of analysis. By suggesting that his work might also be understood as a form of historical ontology—one that most effectively complements Heidegger’s own work—I do not mean that it is not also centrally concerned with epistemology. Rather, I am suggesting that Foucault’s work points beyond the preoccupation with ideas, concepts and even forms of rationality that has so dominated the epistemological tradition. By referring throughout this work to a ‘historical ontology of freedom’, I am suggesting that a complete analysis of our ‘understanding and experience of Being’ (as Heidegger might put it) cannot proceed but through an analysis of those basic practices—the modes of technological-practical involvement in a world, including the relationship of the self to itself—out of which our explicitly thematized knowledge claims and self-understandings are derived. As Ian Hacking formulates the term, 

Historical ontology is about the ways in which the possibilities for choice, and for being, arise in history. It is not to be practiced in terms of grand abstractions, but in terms of the explicit formations in which we can constitute ourselves, formations whose trajectories can be plotted as clearly as those of trauma or child development, or, at one remove, that can be traced more obscurely by larger organizing concepts such as objectivity or even facts themselves. Historical ontology is not so much about the formation of character as about the space of possibilities for character formation that surround a person, and create the potentials for ‘individual experience’… At its boldest, historical ontology would show how to understand, act out, and resolve present problems, even when in so doing it generated new ones.

---


384 Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, pp.23-24; emphasis added.
The later Foucault’s renewed interest in Heidegger (and, for that matter, also in Hegel and Schopenhauer) is best understood in terms of historical ontology if by the phrase we mean an analysis of ‘contextualized epistemology’: a demonstration of how our knowledge of the world is linked to basic practices in the world.\(^{385}\) Whereas Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche sought an overcoming of the gap between objective knowledge and a finite subject in a final, absolute moment—either the achievement of Absolute Spirit, the total renunciation of the self, or the assertion of the Übermensch—Foucault (not unlike Heidegger) sees the self as engaged in perpetual self-transformation.

A historical ontology of freedom following from Heidegger and Foucault aims then not at a final vocabulary or theory that would reveal a state of being that was fully self-transparent and absent of conflicting interpretation. Rather, it aims to study the various relations between the “modes of subjectification” and “modes of objectification” that make up the present field of possibilities in which one is situated. We take up previous models, languages and philosophical projects then not merely as a set of principles or concepts about which one can either be ‘for’ or ‘against’. Rather, we will attempt to see these alternative traditions—in this case the philosophy of the constituting subject and of teleological anthropology following from Descartes and Kant—as both an ethical poiesis (a work performed on oneself) and as a technē (a practical activity of relating to the world with a corresponding rationality). Seen from this vantage point, then, these alternatives are not merely negative foils one attempts to discredit and discard. Rather, they are the practical world, or what Foucault would call the ‘form of

\(^{385}\) Arnold Davidson makes the point that ‘historical epistemology’ is based on the notion that “to understand a concept… is to understand the style of reasoning of which it is part.” Davidson, The Emergence of Sexuality: Historical Epistemology and the Formation of Concepts (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2001), p.182. Substitute ‘style of reasoning’ with ‘form of life’ or ‘mode of being-in-the-world’ and we have a position on par with Heidegger’s.
problematization’, out of which our own spiritual practices of resistance and transformation emerge, thus requiring them even as we move beyond them. An understanding of freedom as a particular relationship to our practical world of involvement, and the spiritual practices of self transformation that help attune us to the possibilities of the present field, allows us to see that freedom is not something that will ever be ‘achieved’ in some final, absolute moment. Rather, because it is linked to the very problematization it diagnoses and resists, it is a relationship that cannot be exhaustively determined. As Ian Hacking puts it, this “means that there is nothing to be said about freedom, except that within its space we construct our ethics and our lives.”

III. Remainders

All this is not to say that significant differences don’t remain between Heidegger and Foucault. I will conclude here by noting three. The first seems rather trivial at first, a question of emphasis rather than fundamental division. Whereas Heidegger points to the necessity of basic practices as the background of ontological understanding, and thus also points to them as the ground of freedom, Foucault actually describes them in their historical detail. Besides offering a richer analysis of how modern technology, humanism and subjectivism arose in the west, Foucault’s mode of analysis then helps him avoid some of the charges of romanticism with respect to questions of freedom. Since Heidegger declines to analyze the specific background practices that are the soil for the

---

386 Hacking, p.120. Arnold Davidson puts the point about freedom and agency in the emergence of new forms of experience or domains of knowledge, power and action in the following way: “It is important to insist that new statements and new concepts do not appear at will. An individual does not just decide to create a new statement. The field of utilization or field of stabilization that creates the conditions of possibility for a new statement is typically very elaborate, and, under these circumstances, we should expect to find not just a single new statement or a single new individual concept, but a whole new field of possibilities.” Davidson, The Emergence of Sexuality, pp.186-187.
modern technological era, he also has little specific analysis of those micro-practices within this domain which might be the ‘saving grace’. Hence, Heidegger can only gesture at the ever present possibility of nontechnological practices in ‘releasement’.387 These practices, which Hubert Dreyfus calls Heidegger’s ‘religious form of resistance,’388 do not involve a direct assault on modern technological ordering.389 Rather, they are practices which counsel an attentiveness to the ethical import of what one is doing—in Foucault’s terminology, to the conduct of one’s conduct. Because Heidegger did not focus on these practices themselves and the possibilities they engendered in the present, Heideggerian scholars tend to merely lament their demise.

Hubert Dreyfus, for instance, argues that

Nontecnological micro-practices, if they still exist at all, are now hard to discern, not because they are so pervasive as to be ineffable, or so numinous as to be unreachable—they were once palpably present in cultural exemplars such as the Greek Temple—but because they are dispersed by the objectifying practices which have had such success since the Enlightenment.390

By looking to Foucault’s attentive analysis of the practices of the care of the self in pre-modern societies, however, I think we can avoid both some of the romanticism and the despair that the Heideggerian approach tends to provoke. Foucault’s studies of the care of the self become for us ‘exemplary histories’ of spiritual practices whereby new ‘worlds’ were disclosed by nontechnological means. If we read, for instance, volumes II and III of The History of Sexuality as well as the parrhesia lectures in this light we see

387 It is not, of course, that Heidegger provides us with no tools for thinking about the possibilities of such practices today. Rather, his discussion of these things is rather abbreviated, limited in scope and strike many as idealized, usually reserved to such things as a “conversation on a country path”, hiking, etc. The single most important domain in which Heidegger placed hope (and most consistently throughout his career) was of course art. To discuss this, however, would be a full, separate project.
388 Hubert Dreyfus, ‘Holism and Hermeneutics,’ Review of Metaphysics 34 (September 1980): 3-23, p.22. For an account that reads Wittgenstein along these lines as well, see Arnold Davidson, ‘Éthique, philosophie et exercices spirituels: De Plotin à Wittgenstein,’ Europe (Oct. 2004).
389 In the manner of Foucault’s understanding of ‘resistance’ in the model of war, discussed in Chapter Six.
390 Hubert Dreyfus, ‘Holism and Hermeneutics,’ p.22.
instances of a historical ontology of situated freedom. Because Foucault provides more detailed analysis of the basic practices which constitute the field of practical involvement, he also can provide a more complete picture how I might ‘realize’ a care-full mode of being-in-the-world. The practices of the care of the self are not, of course, meant themselves to be transposed into modern, technological society. Not only would this be sociologically naive, there are many aspects of these particular practices which we might find repugnant. Foucault’s descriptive analysis of these practices is not, therefore meant to be taken as a ‘tool kit’—a collection of activities which we can remove from their context and employ instrumentally for our own purposes. Rather, they are ‘exemplary histories’ meant to remind us that such practices are always at play, thus directing our attention to their possible correlates today.391

A second important difference that remains between Heidegger and Foucault is that, as other commentators have pointed out, Foucault avoids the tendency toward epochal ‘holism’ found in Heidegger’s characterization of the ‘history of Being in the West’.392 As discussed in previous chapters, Foucault relies upon a notion of ‘contingent eventalization’ as a crucial opening point for freedom. Since he does not see a single, unified ground for the preontological understanding of an age, Foucault does not employ an interpretive hermeneutic to reveal this previously concealed feature. Rather, he

---

391 Foucault writes, “I would say this: one should totally and absolutely suspect anything that claims to be a return. One reason is a logical one; there is in fact no such thing as a return. History, and the meticulous interest applied to history, is certainly one of the best defenses against this theme of the return... History protects us from historicism—from a historicism that calls on the past to resolve the questions of the present.” (FR, 250)

392 See Jana Sawicki, ‘Heidegger and Foucault: Escaping Technological Nihilism,’ in Milchman and Rosenberg (eds.) Foucault and Heidegger, pp.55-73, 69; also, Steven Hicks, ‘Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault,’ p.99. Hicks writes, “Foucault’s analysis is less totalizing than Heidegger’s. He does not attempt to provide a general account of the beliefs and practices that compose the ‘essence’ of modern technology, nor does he attempt to ground an alternative way of life on some objective account of what human beings essentially are.” Finally, John McCumber argues that for Foucault, “Heidegger’s gravest sin was the undifferentiated nature of his epochal analyses.” Philosophy and Freedom (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2000), p.110.
focuses attention on the contingent and conflicting practices which together may produce a relatively stable set of power/knowledge relations but are nevertheless not founded on a unified understanding and thus cannot be displaced by revealing this fact.\footnote{Foucault’s attempt to capture not the underlying meaning or intent of a set of practices, but rather their practical effect is summarized nicely when he states, “People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what what they do does.” Cited in Dreyfus and Rabinow, \textit{Michel Foucault}, p.187.}

The non-holistic nature of Foucault’s epochal analysis provides an alternative route for developing Heidegger’s ontology in the direction of social theory. Previous attempts at providing such an analysis have tended to see epochs as undergirded by a single unifying principle or \textit{archê} that, once rendered explicit, could provide the basis for a historical analysis of the ‘understanding of Being’ prevalent in that era. Reiner Schürmann has, for instance, attempted just such a ‘genealogy of the economies of presencing’ through studies of their ‘epochal principles’: the foundational \textit{archê} of any given age. Schürmann’s call for an an-archic politics is parallel to my own attempt to develop a situated, non-teleological account of freedom.\footnote{Reiner Schürmann, \textit{Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy} (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987), p.41.} It does, however, commit one to a form of historical holism that effaces the overlap and continuity in historical change—something which Foucault’s work on the ‘revolts of conduct’ seeks to foreground.

Finally, perhaps due to their differing relationship to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault conflict on the degree to which truly ‘new’ phenomena can be brought into being. On this question, Heidegger was particularly wary of the kind of Nietzschean language Foucault invokes at times that speaks of ‘living aesthetically’ as a process of “mak[ing] something that is not yet there”\footnote{Nietzsche writes, “It is we, the thinking-sensing ones, who really and continually make something that is not yet there… This poem that we have invented is constantly internalized, drilled, translated into flesh and reality, indeed, into the common place, by the so-called practical human beings (our actors). Whatever has}. From Heidegger’s perspective, Foucault
may often fall into the same problematic he sees in Nietzsche: that precisely in his attempt to overturn Cartesian subjectivism, he extends and radicalizes it. Heidegger considers Nietzsche to be the “consummation” of the metaphysics of subjectivity because through the doctrine of the will to power Nietzsche (supposedly) sought freedom “exclusively in the free self-development of all the creative powers of man.” (N, 4:89). This doctrine is, therefore, for Heidegger “the most extreme withdrawal of Being” and thus “the fulfillment of nihilism proper” (N, 4:204, 232). Rather than speak of making something new by an act of the individual will, therefore, Heidegger focuses on our capacity to uncover the latent possibilities already within our care-full relations. This is why all the examples he gives appear to be paradoxically passive and active: attending, waiting for the call of Being, an engagement that is a letting-be, etc. This is also why he highlights the etymological roots of truth in the Greek *aletheia* as ‘unconcealment’.

Whether one is unconcealing latent possibilities or making something new in a willful matter is a very fine distinction (some might say, impossibly so). Ultimately then, perhaps we can only know if we are doing one or the other by caring for ourselves—being attentive—in Foucault’s sense.

What does the development of an analysis of freedom in terms of practical involvement, relationships within a ‘world’ and field of possibilities contribute to contemporary political theory? At minimum, it hopefully points beyond the impasse...
many see between either a historical teleology of progress on the one hand or a hyper critical politics of irony and despair on the other. Either we accept the notion that humanity progresses along a unilinear historical narrative, or we accede to relativism and accept that there are no better or worse alternatives to the specific practical problems facing the present. What I read in the attentive ethics of care gestured at by Heidegger and Foucault is the possibility for moving beyond such a dilemma. I have suggested throughout, therefore, that we can read these two in a manner that shows us the ever-present possibilities for a creative, hopeful politics: not a politics of the heroic overcoming of our age, the reserve of ‘grand figures’, but rather a politics of ethical sensitivity and care for what is required in the present, one which preserves the past while simultaneously disclosing latent possibilities for its transformation. What they suggest is that the field or horizon in which we find ourselves is never as totalizing as it may seem. Rather, taken up as a field of practical involvement undergirded not by a single, unifying ‘understanding of being’, but rather only the activities of disclosure in which we are thrown, we can see that there are always resources available to us to enable critique and transformation. The openness to these resources, their mobilization and practical use, will be our situated freedom.

It is then perhaps accurate to refer to both Heidegger and Foucault as ‘anti-foundationalist’, not in the sense that they accept no better or worse accounts or practical solutions to our current ethical-political problems, but rather, in the sense that they reject the view that knowledge of what is required in the present can deductively derived from an initial starting point that holds true regardless of context. It flows from this that no theoretical system, or legal-political order that might be based upon this system, can
‘institutionalize’ freedom. In fact, as both thinkers would attest, this ‘foundationalist’ form of thinking\textsuperscript{396} not only fail to secure our freedom, they actually lead away from the lived, practical activities that ‘realize’ freedom in the particular space in which it may found in the present. Since both Heidegger and Foucault argue that our ideas derive from involvement within specific, practical ‘worlds’, they also counsel a certain acceptance of our finitude. This is, of course, troubling to those who argue that some ideas cannot or should not be subject to historicizing, that securing the necessary and universal standing of such principles is the prerequisite for freedom as such. Through Heidegger and Foucault, however, I believe we can see that no such ‘securing’ is possible, or even desirable. This is not to give up on the possibility of ‘better’ or ‘worse’ accounts \textit{per se}. But it is to insist upon the \textit{lived relationship} between our theoretically held viewpoints and the modes of being-in-the-world, the field of practical involvement, that make these viewpoints intelligible, let alone desirable.\textsuperscript{397} As alluded to in the opening chapter, much violence has been done in the name of freedom, understood as moving teleologically through history in stages of development, thus justifying the coercive power of ‘higher’ free selves over ‘lower’ subjugated selves. At one point, Foucault refers to these projects of guaranteeing freedom through institutionalization as “machines libératrices”, adding, however, that “il n’y a pas, par definition, de machines de liberté.” (\textit{DE2}, 1096)\textsuperscript{398} What I suggest is that the only security against the forms of violence, oppression and

\textsuperscript{396}The two models discussed here are the philosophy of the constituting subject and the model of historical teleology.

\textsuperscript{397}Arnold Davidson writes, “I simple want to emphasize that Foucault did not claim that writing the history of forms of rationality had the effect of turning the rational into the irrational, as if his goal was to put reason on trial. Rather, his recourse to history was meant to show how our forms of rationality depended on human practices, to indicate that these practices were neither necessary nor self-evident, and thus to provide a space to help to free us from a sense of fatalism.” (Davidson, 189)

\textsuperscript{398}“liberating machines” ; “there are no machines of freedom, by definition.” ‘Space, Knowledge and Power,’ \textit{FR}, pp.239-256, 247.
subjugation that we seek to avoid is not to be found in building a better ‘liberation machine’, but rather is guaranteed by being in a manner corresponding to our ideals, to comport ourselves in a manner that best ‘realizes’ them. Hence the insight from Wittgenstein that opened this chapter: “The way to solve the problem you see in life is to live in a way that will make what is problematic disappear.”

Hence too Foucault’s claim which serves as both a hopeful reminder and a warning: “je pense qu’il n’appartient jamais à la structure des choses de garantir l’exercice de la liberté. La garantie de la liberté est la liberté.” (DE2, 1095)

Works Cited


399 Wittgenstein, op cit. at 1.
400 “I think that it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom.” (FR, 245)


Caputo, John. ‘On not knowing who we are: Madness, Hermeneutics, and the Night of Truth in Foucault,’ in *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000)


Deleuze, Gilles. *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988)


Djaballah, Marc. *Kant, Foucault and the Forms of Experience* (NY & London: Routledge, 2008)

Dreyfus, Hubert. “‘Being and Power’ revisited,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.) *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).


Dreyfus, Hubert. ‘Beyond Hermeneutics: Interpretation in Late Heidegger and Recent Foucault,’ in Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (eds.), *Hermeneutics: Questions and proposals*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984)


Dreyfus, Hubert. ‘Holism and Hermeneutics,’ *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (September 1980): 3-23

Elden, Stuart. ‘Reading Genealogy as Historical Ontology,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)


Forst, Rainer. ‘Endlichkeit, Freiheit, Individualität: Die Sorge um das Selbst bei Heidegger und Foucault,’ in Eva Erdmann, Rainer Forst & Axel Honneth (Hg.) *Ethos der Modern: Foucaults Kritik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1990), pp. 146-181


Gros, Frédéric. ‘Situation du cours,’ in Michel Foucault, *L ’herméneutique du sujet* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001)


Habermas, Jürgen. *Philosophisch-politische Profile* (Frankfurt-Main: Suhrhamp, 1971)


Han, Béatrice. ‘Foucault and Heidegger on Kant and Finitude,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)


Hekman, Susan (ed.). Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996)


Ijsseling, Samuel. ‘Foucault with Heidegger,’ Man and World, 19(1986): 413-424


Kant, Immanuel. Political Writings (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991)


Levinas, Emmanuel. Totality and Infinity (Pittsburg: Dequesne UP, 1969)


McGushin, Edward F. *Foucault’s Askēsis* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 2007)


McWhorter, Ladelle. ‘Subjecting Dasein,’ in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003)


Ramazanoglu, Caroline (ed.). *Up Against Foucault: Exploration of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism* (NY: Routledge, 1993)


Rayner, Timothy. *Foucault’s Heidegger: Philosophy and Transformative Experience* (NY Continuum, 2007)


Schneeberger, Giudo (Hrsg.). *Nachlese zu Heidegger* (Bern: Suhr, 1962)


Schwartz, Michael. ‘Repetition and Ethics in Late Foucault,’ *Telos* 117 (Fall 1999): 113-132


Spanos, William V. *Heidegger and Criticism: Retrieving the cultural politics of destruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993)


Tully, James. ‘To think and act differently: Foucault’s four reciprocal objections to Habermas’ theory,’ in Samantha Ashenden and David Owen (eds.) Foucault Contra Habermas (London: Sage, 1999)


