

Gim GRECU
“A.I. Cuza” University of Iasi

THE SEARCH FOR RESPONSIBILITY. ESSAY ON MICHEL FOUCAULT’S WORKS

Abstract

In this paper, I propose myself to overview the problem of responsibility in the works of Michel Foucault. As one of Foucault’s main themes is the ‘subject’, I aim at revealing, next to his dynamic inquiries, the correspondent instantiations of responsibility. In French, the term ‘subject’ has two main meanings¹: a passive one – to be submitted, to be dependent, and an active one – to have conscience, acknowledgment of your self, to be center of actions and thoughts. It can be said that these meanings polarize Foucault’s analyses about the subject. The first meaning (present in his earlier works), un-allowing a major role from subject’s part, minimizes its responsibility, directing it towards the points of dependence. The second (his later writings) creates the possibility that the subject can give an account about his actions and about himself. I attach to each of these foucauldian positions a type of ethos: one critical and one hermeneutical, trying to reveal how Foucault is situated in rapport with these modern attitudes.

Key words: Foucault, responsibility, subject, critique, ethos

A. Michel Foucault’s works are the enthusiastic marks of an attitude. Alike other philosophers that positioned themselves against systematization (e.g., Nietzsche, Deleuze, Levinas, the later Wittgenstein) and condemned the over-historical constraints of a universal type of reasoning², Foucault proposed an effective exercise of thinking. That is, he opposed thinking to dogmatism; to think is an activity, is dynamicity; therefore, it modifies while it activates³. Perhaps is not old-

¹ “Il y a deux sens au mot « sujet » : sujet soumis à l’autre par le contrôle et dépendance, et sujet attaché à sa propre identité par la conscience ou la connaissance de soi”. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, Ed. Gallimard, 1994, p. 227.

² Habermas: “these attitudes point back to the break with tradition (Karl Löwith) that occurred when the spirit of the age gained ascendancy over philosophy, when the modern consciousness of time exploded the form of philosophical thought”. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Polity Press, 1990, p. 52.

³ “Ce travail de modification de sa propre pensée et de celle des autres me paraît être la raison d’être des intellectuels”. Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, p. 675.

fashioned to re-evoke a definition, belonging to Aristotle, of what thinking is: the movement from known to unknown.

Against the philosophical tradition (which activates by ‘conquering’ the unknown and considers the move from known to unknown as an indefinite progress of truth), this unknown (*le Dehors*, in Foucault’s terms) can be grasped through a movement describable as an aperture, a displacement. It destructs the entities of reason constitutive for the European culture (principles, laws, categories, transcendentals), entities solidified by a tradition which, for a period, considered them to be a-temporal.

This breach inside the concepts, inside the reason, gives a new kind of access to experience, revealing in the same time an inadequate relation, a conflict, between reason and history. These preliminary remarks are regarding the critique Foucault applied to the system of evidences that ground theoretically the western knowledge, nevertheless with practical consequences. What Foucault sustains is the historical character of all epistemic concepts (he says that there is a history of reason too), of all the paradigms of thought, through this condemning the prominence scientific that knowledge has in explaining human nature and human life. “Toutes mes analyses vont contre l’idée de nécessités universelles dans l’existence humaine. Elle soulignent le caractère arbitraire des institutions et nous montrent de quel espace de liberté nous disposons encore, quels sont les changements qui peuvent encore s’effectuer”⁴.

In his first books, Foucault investigates the historical conditions (that is to say economical, social, institutional, comprehensive conditions) under which certain type of subjects were formed, accentuating his analyses on the starting points of modern human sciences like psychology, medicine, but also on the development of the social institutions. He connects these developments with the rational component of the European culture, holding the last responsible for instituting normative comprehension over the subjects. Foucault institutes the couple: *savoir - pouvoir*, considering that “il n’y a pas de modèle de vérité qui ne renvoie a un type de pouvoir”⁵. The unbreakable relation between truth and power consists in the fact that they affect each other, their interlace giving birth to certain types of subjects. As an example, in *La naissance de la clinique*, he investigated “les causalités complexes et les déterminations réciproques entre le développement d’un certain type de savoir médical et les transformations d’un champ institutionnel lies directement a des changements sociaux et politiques”⁶.

His investigations reach a drastic level, revealing certain types of subjects that are created by exclusion from normality, through rational methods of

⁴ M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrites*, vol. IV, p. 779.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Ed. Minuit, 1986, p. 46.

⁶ M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrites*, vol. IV, p. 582.

differentiation⁷. The fact that the subjects have no other determination than being formed is a frequent accuse for Foucault's early works, since he leaves the subjects without any other identity than the one given in the submissive rapports with institutions, sciences. The subjects seem to be like sculpting stone (or marble) in the hands of the invisible yet practical power of the institutions, they are pre-determined scientifically and institutionally; they have no other force than the force to obey. Yet, Foucault assesses that "Le pouvoir ne s'exerce que sur des « sujets libres », et en tant qu'ils sont « libres » - entendons par là des sujets individuels ou collectifs qui ont devant eux un champ de possibilité ou plusieurs conduites, plusieurs réactions et divers modes de comportement peuvent prendre place"⁸.

To understand the degree of determination of the subjects, we must deepen into the epistemological and historical dispute Foucault has with the rational modernity. The historical becoming, at least in what concerns human beings, is in conflict with the level of formalization, certainty and predictability proposed by sciences. The dispute has a long history. Dilthey differentiated in the XIX century between *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*. He assessed that the natural science's method is inadequate for the comprehension of human nature. After him, philosophers like Nietzsche, Husserl (in his later works), Heidegger, Gadamer, etc. contoured a modality of comprehension (let us say 'hermeneutics', although the early Husserl is the parent of the phenomenology) that would autonomously describe human's *Lebenswelt*. In their works, the important factors that constitute human beings are temporality and finitude, condemning the hyper-rationality in a sort of naturalization of knowledge.

The concept that surrounds their researches is the one of *ethos*, understood as the natural perspectives the human being (the subject) has on his determinations: the others, his own culture and different ones, the world he lives in, his work, etc. The accent here is practical, even though the named philosophers develop their philosophies in different directions. To explain Foucault's position I will conjoin this hermeneutical *ethos* with another type of *ethos*, critique this time (the Kantian one), as Foucault presents it in his "*What is Enlightenment?*" The reason I differentiated two types of *ethos* (a hermeneutical and a critical one), placing Foucault in the second one, is that Foucault is closer to the critical Frankfurt School in what concerns the method (the quasi-structuralism and also the positivist sides of his researches) and the content of his ideas (strong social and political criticism) than is to the hermeneutical current. A second reason is that Foucault himself rejected the hermeneutical methods, considering them not forceful enough for a critical attitude.

⁷ "[...] les pratiques divisantes » [...] Le partage entre le fou et l'homme sain de l'esprit, le malade et l'individu en bonne santé, le criminel et le « gentil garçon » illustre cette tendance". Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, p. 223.

⁸ M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrites*, vol. IV, p. 237.

B. Before that, I will concentrate the discussion on the modern philosophical conceptions about subject and history. As Foucault says in *Les mots et les choses*, the modernity is an overturn of the entire previous paradigm of thought. If classical age was a metaphysics of the infinity and of the representation (and the human finitude was determined in rapport with this universality), during modernity the finitude and the inherent human limits are understood through themselves. In the classical age “l’homme, comme réalité épaisse et première, comme objet difficile et sujet souverain de toute connaissance possible, n’y a aucune place. Les thèmes modernes d’un individu vivant, parlant et travaillant selon les lois d’une économie, d’une philologie et d’une biologie, mais qui, par une sorte de tension interne et de recouvrement, aurait reçu, par le jeu de ces lois elles-mêmes, le droit de les connaître et de les mettre entièrement au jour, tous ces thèmes pour nous familiers et liés à l’existence des «sciences humaines» sont exclus par la pensée classique”⁹.

In modernity the finitude becomes the starting point (and by this gets a degree of positivity it did not have earlier) from which the modern human understands himself. Now, the reason, losing its a-temporal powers, is in defense but also in search for profiles to match the human finitude and his modes of existence, (Foucault identifies work, language, life as main directions for his researches). This radical *Kehre* did not occur without traumatizing effects, if we are to take into account Nietzsche’s diagnosis regarding the European nihilism from *The Will to Power*¹⁰.

In Kant’s philosophy, the human subject is simultaneously occupying two positions: empirical subject (belonging to the phenomenal world, determined by the laws of nature) and transcendental subject (center of knowledge, constituting the world as a unitary totality of the experience, apt for freedom). For the subject, the world is divided into phenomenal and noumenal; yet, in the realm of experience, Kant annuls the possibility to reach the noumena, we have only access to phenomena.

These phenomena are of a high diversity and are without order. If there is organized knowledge, this comes from the fact that the transcendental subject has a structure that orders the diverse perceptions of the senses. A faculty somehow obscure of the subject assures the continuity of knowledge: the transcendental. This faculty is “a basic power of the human soul which underlies a priori all cognition”¹¹. In other words, this special imagination assures the possibility that the categories of the intellect (the structure of the transcendental ego) match the

⁹ M. Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*, Ed. Gallimard, 1966, p. 321.

¹⁰ This consideration is not based only on Nietzsche; the *Weltschmerz*, the late romanticism, and, at the border of the XIXth and the XXth century, the works of Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard, Unamuno, Heidegger, Camus, are about the dramatic rapports between transcendence and finitude, about the death of God and the laicization of the world.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of pure reason*, Hackett Publishing Company, 1996, p. 170.

diverse of the intuition (senses). The presupposition behind this perspective was that the conditions of experience and the conditions of the object of experience were identical.

This is the basis of Kant's critique concerning any metaphysics: the empirical-transcendental couple. There is no knowledge that is not a connection between empirical (experience) and transcendental (the structure of the subject). The limit of knowledge is here. The new metaphysics he proposes is about the conditions of possibility of something; is about the transcendental subject, his faculties and about the knowledge he can achieve about the world.

In this Kantian framework, the fact that the world is historical (in his terms only phenomenal), the history itself, being deficient in universality and necessity (conditions for science), is abandoned to the empirical realm (without having internal regularities). But, if we do not reach a comprehension of history, that: "sera la ruine morale de la philosophie, car enfin nous sommes des êtres historiques et si philosophiquement l'histoire nous est étrangère, nous sommes a nous-mêmes étrangers"¹².

This deficiency was recognized by Hegel, the philosopher who, by his giant efforts to unify in a rational system the idealist-dialectical philosophy and the historical events (to give history a transcendental background), was the end of the modern idealist philosophy. These difficulties made that Karl Marx's philosophy (directly influenced by Hegel's dialectics and by the master-slave theory), not so interested about abstract distinctions, therefore better focused on facticity and action, to be credited as an explanation of historical events. The consequences of Marx's ideas for the communist ideology, but also for the twentieth century's history, are well known; if not, they should be. Returning to Kant, for him, when the reason is applied to history (that is to say practical reason), nevertheless, it can provide:

- a) at individual level – moral law (the categorical imperative)
- b) at communitarian level – projections, ideals (eternal peace, cosmopolitanism),

without pretending that reason can provide knowledge for the objective historical processes. "Il y aurait une histoire réaliste (Real-Geschichte) si l'on pouvait effectivement prédire. Mais puisque cela est impossible, il n'y aura d'autre histoire de l'humanité qu'idéale (Ideal-Geschichte). Cette histoire idéale sera construite a partir de la notion de *devoir*, immanente a la raison humaine et par conséquent a l'espèce"¹³.

In this way, it can be affirmed that the Kantianism provides an *internal* teleology of the historicity, a commitment with moral stakes that corresponds to an

¹² Alexis Philonenko, *La théorie kantienne de l'histoire*, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 1986, p. 16.

¹³ A. Philonenko, *La théorie kantienne de l'histoire*, p. 79.

Enlightenment type of project. These ideas are connected with the type of subject Kant proposes – rational and autonomous, assuring the foundations for knowledge by his transcendental faculty. Kant understands the autonomy of the subject with the Greek meaning of the word: the subject gives himself his laws to follow. He makes his own rules. However, he should teleological develop towards the universal moral law – the categorical imperative. The “reason” is unique, says Kant; if the subjects intend to be moral, they must tend towards the rational universal morality. Kant is conscientious about the human finitude and limits, yet intends to provide the universal law as an ideal to follow in practical life.

The autonomy of the subject is assessed by making God, immortality, freedom, mere Ideas (in the sense of ideals, of projections) of the reason. Joining the autonomy of the finite subject with the forbid to overpass the transcendental - empirical correlation, we obtain the anthropological structure of the modernity.

I mentioned that Foucault realizes a critique of the modern paradigm of thought. He explicitly situates his critique in Kantian influence, describing it as a critical ontology of what we are¹⁴. While Kant aimed to establish the transcendental limits to subjectivity, Foucault aims to show the ways in which subjectivity is historically constituted. Methodologically, Foucault modifies radically the Kantian critique – in the sense that he transforms the transcendental Kantian type of conditioning into a mere contingent historical one, keeping the basic question: what are the conditions of possibility for something?

He renounces at the subject as center of knowledge, his analyses aim at being scientific in the sense that they are concatenations of documents (discourses – *énoncés*¹⁵ and visibilities), analyzed from the perspective of their contingent coherency and of the preeminence of the events in which they occur aside the theoretical background. Foucault designates the type of knowledge he uses as *savoir(s)*, understanding it as an activity free of constitutive backgrounds, unchained in references to origins or to any historical-transcendental teleology, as well as free of any connections to the constitutive subject (ego) of knowledge of the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm. For the type of knowledge he criticizes, Foucault uses the term *connaissance*, charging it with formalist content, assuming to it premises like:

- the laws of construction of a science are in the same time conditions of existence for the objects of that science;
- there is continuity between science and experience, they are in infinite reversibility.

¹⁴ See the end of the text *What is Enlightenment? II*.

¹⁵ This word means being enounced; the documents Foucault analyzes are writings from historical concrete practices – they are those that form the archive. He does not relate primarily to documents from high culture and philosophy; moreover, he intends to deconstruct the speculative, theoretical preeminence appealing to documents close to the multitude of effective situations in which theory meets practice.

Denouncing the blindness of the modern rational knowledge, Foucault describes the effects of power determined by it in its practical, institutional manifestations, beyond the discourse that sustains its veracity, its justification. This power of the knowledge is traced and localized in its particular fields of activity (hospital, asylum, prison, sanatorium, school) where, besides other kinds of activity, it acts as oppression, it institutes norms for the 'governed', the 'oppressed', the ones that are the 'objects' of this knowledge.

The multiplicity of singular points through which history happens cannot be investigated axiomatically nor typologically, but just topologically (we deal here with a heterotopy, says Foucault). His "objects" of research are discursive and non-discursive (visibilities) practices, un-separated by their concrete, historical contexts and whose conditions of production must be described. The type of knowledge Foucault proposes is an "agencement (arrangement) pratique, un 'dispositif' d'énoncés et de visibilités"¹⁶. Foucault aims to dismantle the bipolarity: subject – object of knowledge, as his type of knowledge (savoir) contains and forms in the same time the subjects and the objects of knowledge¹⁷.

The rapport between discourses and visibilities is not one of correspondence, they cannot be captured in a commune totality; they are heterogeneous, yet they influence each other through un-theoretical networks of singularities. G. Deleuze describes the relation between discourses and visibilities as: "une distance [...] un non-lieu qui témoigne de ce que les adversaires n'appartient pas au même espace ou ne dépendent pas de la même forme"¹⁸. Considering that the discourses and the visibilities are the ones that compound the archive of the foucauldian historian, they presuppose, at genealogical level, what Foucault designated as "diagramme": "l'exposition des rapports de forces qui constituent le pouvoir"¹⁹, the historical configurations compounded by the singular

¹⁶ G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 58.

¹⁷ "[...] la conceptualisation ne doit pas se fonder sur une théorie de l'objet : l'objet conceptualisé n'est pas le seul critère de validité d'une conceptualisation. Il nous faut connaître les conditions historiques qui motivent tel ou tel type de conceptualisation. Il nous faut avoir une conscience historique de la situation dans laquelle nous vivons". Cf. M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrites*, IV, p. 224.

¹⁸ G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 75. We are to understand that the relation between enounces and visibilities is not ruled by correspondence, enounces do not represent facts with the condition to say the truth. More likely, they have primarily separate coherence, influencing each other not directly but in diagonals. Visibilities are not the objects of the world as the science sees them, they are more: "comme des éclairs, des miroitements, des scintillements" (p. 60), objects with becoming identity, variable in function of the different interpretations they receive, yet constituting a separate realm from the one of the discourses. A perfectly good example of visibility is the human body, and, for expressivity, I suggest the way in which it appears in paintings from various styles and periods.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

points in which the power is revealed, is made visible and describable in discourses. “Le pouvoir est local parce qu’il n’est jamais global, mais il n’est pas local ou localisable parce qu’il est diffus”²⁰.

In other words, there is a historical becoming, constituted by means of rapports between conflictual forces (let us say institutions *versus* citizens, or immigrants, or delinquents, etc.); these rapports are concretized in singular points (which arrange contextually in contingent networks) as effects of power, the only ones that are graspable. The influence these institutions have over the particular subjects is called by Foucault *gouvernement*: “Il faut laisser a cet mot la signification très large qu’il avait au XVI siècle. Il ne se referait pas seulement a des structures politiques et a la gestion des États ; mais il désignait la manière de diriger la conduite d’individus ou des groupes : gouvernement des enfants, des âmes, des communautés, des familles, des malades. [...] Gouverner, en ce sens, c’est structurer le champ d’action éventuel des autres”²¹.

C. Foucault situates the entire moral stake in the couple *savoir-pouvoir*, the one that generates the subjects. I said I would use Kant as a mirror for Foucault’s ideas. Kant situates the moral stake in the reason. There is a conflict I want to resolve here – the one that concerns the conditions of possibility for responsibility.

Briefly, the Kantianism assesses a continuity and unity of knowledge, centered in the subject. The transcendental imagination that bonds the intellect and the intuitions is a function of the subjectivity. The anthropological limits are also the limits of knowledge. The finite subjectivity activates inside and acknowledges its own limits. On the other side, it is rationally orientated towards moral duty (revealing a new type of finitude – the moral one, which becomes evident in the efforts humans must do in the fight against inclinations, in comparison with the perfectly moral entities: saints, angels) by the categorical imperative.

Yet, the pure reason could not offer a rational determination of freedom. For Kant, the practical reason is, in a sense, superior to the pure reason, as it reveals the human freedom. The only way to freedom is to act in conformity with the reason, to act and to live reasonable, following the moral law. The moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom says Kant in *Critique of practical reason*.

However, in *What is Enlightenment?*, Kant doubted that the men of his time are adults. He considered that “[...] la paresse et la lâcheté sont les causes qui expliquent qu’un si grand nombre d’hommes [...] restent volontiers, leur vie durant, mineurs et qu’il soit si facile a d’autres de se poser a tuteurs”²². We can trace here the foucauldian conflict between the governors and the governed ones.

²⁰ G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 34.

²¹ M. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrites*, vol. IV, p. 237.

²² A. Philonenko, *La théorie kantienne de l’histoire*, p. 50.

The Kantian answer to this problem is that men should start being autonomous, start reasoning for themselves.

Accordingly, on one side, there is a type of subject understood as center of action and knowledge – the Kantian approach. We can recognize much of it in the comprehension of what a human being is actually. We represent ourselves as rational beings, individuals capable of action, attitude, evaluation, etc. The human beings as they appear in the foundational laws of our societies are equal, independent citizen; they have equal fundamental rights but also must equally obey the laws of their communities. They are responsible for their actions and choices. It sounds very generic – a universal idea.

Nevertheless, the details of the practical social life are revealing an enormous mass of differentiations: “différences juridiques ou traditionnelles de statut et de privilèges; différences économiques dans l’appropriation des richesses et des biens; différences linguistiques ou culturelles; différences dans le savoir-faire et les compétences, etc.”²³ These differences dissipate the general unitary structure of the subject and require another kind of understanding of the conditions in which the subjects act (are responsible). The individuals’ actions and formation are conducted through complex networks of knowledge and influence, settled by increasing institutional devices²⁴.

Foucault settles to his historical researches the following (ethical) condition: “que soit levée la tyrannie des discours englobants avec leur hiérarchie et avec tous les privilèges des avant-gardes théoriques”²⁵. The foucauldian research activates in the game settled between: “des savoirs locaux, discontinus, disqualifiés, non légitimes, contre l’instance théorique qui prétendait les filtrer, les hiérarchiser, les ordonner au nom d’une connaissance vraie”²⁶. The tone of these lines reveals an ethical revolt.

Foucault assesses that the general (moral, political, social) principles and laws, the theories furnish an inadequate comprehension of human beings because they do not give account of the practical differentiations, the effective contexts of life; moreover, they exercise a normative control, they coerce unrecognized power effects over subjects, determining their actions and self-understanding.

Therefore, it can be said that the couple *savoir-pouvoir* is negatively influencing the conditions of possibility for responsibility, minimizing them, minimizing the accountability the subjects have on themselves. Foucault seems to

²³ Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, vol. IV, p. 239.

²⁴ To build an example, the education is guided by economical and political reasons. In nowadays the intensifying amount of technology modifies the curriculum in the sense that the need for updating information looses behind other sides of what was considered essential in education – a consequence being the creation of gaps between generations, therefore the loosing of the social solidarity and the rise of the sentiment of alienation.

²⁵ M. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, Paris, Ed. Seuil, 1997, p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

say that before requiring responsibility from human beings (before judging them) we should inquire what human beings are, how they are formed, how are determined in certain contexts.

Consequently, we have a further level of the discussion. If certain types of subjects are inducted in society, and if the institutions are normatively exercising control over the individuals, how can this situation be remediated? Who and how should assume the responsibility for this situation? This discussion initiated many critiques against Foucault. Using sometimes the attitude I underlined earlier: “la tyrannie des discours englobants”, he was considered ‘anarchist’, suspected to intend a revolt of the governed and excluded (in Marxist style).

In fact, it was not the case. Foucault’s attitude comes from the second type of *ethos* I announced earlier (at the end of the first section) – the critique, Kantian one. In the article: *Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?* Foucault connects his philosophical activity with the Kantian attitude revealed in the Kantian text from 1784, *Was ist Aufklärung?*, describing it as: “un ethos philosophique consistant dans une critique de ce que nous disons, pensons et faisons, à travers une ontologie historique de nous-mêmes. [...] 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 [...] transformer la critique exercée dans la forme de la limitation nécessaire en une critique pratique dans la forme du franchissement possible”²⁷.

From the beginning of his researches, Foucault strategically situated at the crossroads between what is known (and is officially considered knowledge) and the concrete historical events, revealing the inadvertences, the injustice suffered by the events in the scientific knowledge that pretended to explain them. His aim was not to re-construct a new, more adequate knowledge, to offer theories that would rightfully apply in practices. He always considered that when knowledge interferes with the politics and economics, the result is, between others, effects of power. In fact, in any society, the rapports between its members are containing power effects, “Le pouvoir vient d’en-bas”²⁸.

Consequently, he repeatedly assessed that offering alternative general theories will only perpetuate the status quo, with modified determinations of power. On contrary, he meant to criticize the social, political framework by analyzing not the general ideas, their coherency or validity, but their application, their concrete effects. “Plutôt que d’analyser le pouvoir du point de vue de sa rationalité interne, il s’agit d’analyser les relations de pouvoir à travers l’affrontement des stratégies [...] pour comprendre ce que la société entend par « être sensé », analyser ce qui se passe dans le champ de l’aliénation”²⁹.

²⁷ *Dits et Ecrits*, vol. IV, the article *Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?*, pp. 573-574.

²⁸ *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, the article *L’intellectuel et les pouvoirs*, p. 751.

²⁹ *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, the article *Le sujet et le pouvoir*, p. 224.

He criticizes the techniques of power, the over-rationalization, not institutions, classes, intellectuals. “Le problème à la fois politique, éthique, social et philosophique qui se pose à nous aujourd’hui n’est pas d’essayer de libérer l’individu de l’Etat et des ses institutions, mais de nous libérer *nous* de l’Etat et du type d’individualisation qui s’y attache. Il nous faut promouvoir de nouvelles formes des subjectivité en refusant le type d’individualité qu’on nous a impose pendant plusieurs siècles”³⁰.

These lines above reveal the philosophical *ethos* Foucault promotes. What should be done in nowadays is a critical analysis of the power relations from our societies, in an attempt to dislocate the rigid structures that cover the living subjects and to unfold conditions for self-determinations that are less possible power significant. This is not anarchy, is critique, effort of revealing the cognitive pressure weighting over the subjects.

Foucault considered that his responsibility is such an attitude; from my part is one of the not many serious answers given to the problem of human submission to the macro-mechanisms of the actual societies.

D. The ideas brought into play until here were dealing with the ways in which the ‘subject’ is related to and influenced by social frameworks, the different types of subjects determined by the couple *savoir-pouvoir*. There was no mention about the interiority of the subjects. As I said, Foucault is a name for a becoming research, unceasingly opening new senses. In the last steps of his researches, the subject receives a new determination: *epimeleia heautou*, the preoccupation on self, the practices of self; that gives new consistency to the response the subjects give to the historical determinations. This preoccupation gives to the subject a type of content (recovered from the Greek antiquity and the first Christian centuries) opposed to the modern philosophical subject of Descartes and Kant (the rational ego for which reason is guarantor for his actions). The preoccupation of self is the activity produced by the subject for ordering his life; here knowledge is relevant only in the concrete conditions of its acquiring and for concrete needs.

The subject modifies along the process of life, idea opposed to the supposition of a still rational structure. Here, important is what Foucault names spirituality, the conversion of the subject. “[...] la vérité n’est pas donnée au sujet par un simple acte de connaissance, qui serait fondée et légitimé parce qu’il est le sujet et parce qu’il a telle ou telle structure de sujet. [...] 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 a [l’] accès a la vérité”³¹.

Foucault asserts, at the end of *Les mots et les choses*, that the European modernity cannot have a moral. His revival of *epimeleia heautou* proposes an

³⁰ *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, the article *Le sujet et le pouvoir*, p. 232.

³¹ Michel Foucault, *L’hermeneutique du sujet*, Ed. Seuil/Gallimard, 2001, p. 17.

immanent ethics which reverses, admittedly strange for contemporaneity, the subjective rapport between knowledge and “living at yourself” – an informal order of the subject obtained by the exercise of self preoccupation, which provides the self mastery necessary for proper relations with the others, with the community.

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Conclusively, following the problem of responsibility in the foucauldian researches, I identified the tension between subject and the couple *savoir-pouvoir*, conflict that puts into question the subject’s responsibility. Being subject of power determinations, the subject was revealed by Foucault submitted to them, therefore limited in his actions and responsibility.

Alternatively, I opposed this perspective on the subject to the modern (Kantian mostly) vision about the subject, the precursor of the official existent perspective in what concerns the subject (where are not recognized power influences affecting the identity of the subject). Here, I considered necessary details about the Kantian and foucauldian epistemological positions, aiming to accentuate the differences (necessity –contingence, transcendental – historical, unity - multiplicity) and to reveal Foucault’s methods of historical analyses.

Further, the responsibility for the diminished responsibility of the subjects belongs to the increasingly controlling social institutions, converging in the giant political-economical structure that is the rational structured State. The attitude towards this new intrigue was, from Foucault’s part, to propose particular and fervent critiques. He assumed this task as a responsibility; now, the intellectual must not provide knowledge but to analyze the complicated game between knowledge and facts, condemning, where is the case, the abuses of power. Moreover, he should unfold perspectives for non- (or less possible) abusive uses of institutional powers.

He must get into light the *ethos* of a critique grasping of what human beings are in the actual social framework.

Finally, in his late works Foucault proposes an alternative to the Kantian self-determination of the subject; he suggests a different taking into account of the self, not grounded on a rational structure but on a continuous preoccupation for the practical connections the subject find himself in. Knowledge is the grasping of the contexts and situations in which the subject is involved, the attitudes he has related to them, therefore a continuous modification of self-understanding accompanied by modifications of self-structure. This perspective is revitalized from Stoics, through Nietzsche. The subject must create himself as he understands and gets to know; truth is not something above experience, is the comprehension of the experience.

My final idea is that the understanding of the subject as self-preoccupation from Foucault’s late writings is not in discrepancy with his earlier investigations. Although it may seem that these positions give different accounts over subjects – one where the subject is submitted, the other giving an active role to the subject -, they are in perfect coherency. The active vision about the subject is part of the

assignment of the *ethos* I mentioned, being, as to say, the next step to do (after the critique) in achieving the liberty of the subjects. I do not consider it mere an aesthetic Nietzschean perspective over subject, more likely is the project of providing new determinations for the subject that would counteract the limits historically imposed, modifying and surpassing them using the very means of the critique action.

In this sense, the bipolar philosophical activity proposed by Foucault aims at disclosing the powerful conceptual frameworks that bind societies not by replacing them with better (more rightful) paradigms; instead, he offers a way out by de-intellectualizing the comprehension of the human, in the sense that not a mere theoretical instance is at play when subjects are formed – we have to deal with a highly effective source: the power, which makes knowledge efficient. Foucault did a great work in revealing the conjoined modes of operation of these two instances: power and knowledge.

Directing his researches towards the capillaries of the power effects, he revealed that humans in specific contexts are the ones that dispose the power, as well as they are the ones that submit to it. There is no discussion about blame here, that would require a casuistically approach. More likely, it is to think about the effectiveness of the power, to which both the subjects and objects are connected. This effectiveness is represented by the modern structure of the society, at institutional, governmental, economical and cultural levels.

In Foucault's perspective, what a responsible attitude should do is, firstly, the applied critique of power and, secondly, the constituting of a form of subjectivity that does not assemble into an oppressing rational structure to be institutionalized. In this second stage, Foucault meets the other *ethos* I mentioned at the end of the first section, the hermeneutical one. It would be superficial to say that the hermeneutical *ethos* is not critical, therefore could not be used into the first stage. It must not be ignored that the foucauldian couple *savoir-pouvoir* is taken from a highly hermeneutical philosophy, that of Nietzsche. The difference is that a hermeneutical critique has not by itself sufficient force (in the sense of effective challenges directed towards the centers of power, using persuasive evidences) to denounce the negative effects of power; it must be reconsidered, strengthened with, in Foucault's case, a quasi-structuralist method.

In the second stage, the hermeneutical perspective is central, because the coherence searched for is not functional, instrumental, but one of self-edification, working with living meanings, with changing perspectives, one that is not formalized in instrumental arrangements. If this new (although old enough) form of subjectivity would increasingly activate in society, the result would be if not a diminishing of the oppressive effects, at least a permanent critique responding to them.

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Gim GRECU: PhD Candidate and researcher, "A.I. Cuza" University of Iasi (Romania).
E-mail: gim.grecu@gmail.com