The question of subject in Foucault

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Abstract: Based on a synthetic demarcation on the three phases of Michel Foucault's research, we sought to highlight the importance and necessity to review the question of subject in his work, particularly after his research on ethical issues in ancient Greece and Rome. It was concluded that this review has important consequences to guide researches in Psychology or Human Sciences in general.

Keywords: Foucault, subject, subjectivation, ethics.

Introduction

The objective of this article is to highlight a problem in the question of the subject in the works of Michel Foucault, from a division that became conventional (being corroborated by the author himself, as will be seen below) and appears in three phases: archeology, genealogy and ethics, and to propose a concept of subject from it that is associated with evaluations of Foucault about his own work found in some interviews. If, on the one hand, the conventional interpretation of a work or thought represents a certain simplification of a more dynamic and plural field, on the other, it may be the possibility of an organization that brings the nexus that usually gets lost in the myriad or richness of issues that unfold from such ideas. Considering this idea leads us to propose a synthetic exposition of the three steps in the thought of Michel Foucault, to emphasize the importance of the subject question in his ideas and foster a conception of subject that considers Foucault's body of work.

The question of the subject in Foucault came to prominence with the introduction of questions about ethics in his research, something that caused some perplexity in many of his readers, as if the author was contradicting things he had thought of before. In this regard, Foucault's emphatic defense of an experience of thought that always bears the dynamics of change in itself must be noted, even if later on and considering a permanent or longer lasting issue this is discovered under different prisms or situations. As he stated in 1984 regarding the change of focus on his two most recent books on the history of sexuality, his question was always the relationship between the subject and the truth (1984/2004b, p. 264, 274), unfolded as a developing problematic that is prone to new perspectives and evaluations. This can be illustrated using Foucault's own words (1984/2004a):

I don't think there is a great difference between these books and the earlier ones. When you write books like these, you want very much to change what you think entirely and to find yourself at the end of it quite different from what you were at the beginning. Then you come to see that you've really changed relatively little. You mat have changed your point of view, you've gone round and round the problem, which is still the same, namely, the relations between the subject, truth, and the constitution of experience. (p. 289)

Such citation is typically "Kantian", the problem of the conditions and possibilities of our world and thinking experiences – naturally, these were always historic for Foucault –, always remembering that Foucault himself chose to follow Kant's tracks to locate the route of his thought (1984/2004c, p. 234). But with the explicit intent of facing Kant's limitations; as he stated: "There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all" (Foucault, 1984/1998, p. 13).

Given this discussion, wanting to know from the author himself how he evaluates his previous positions is natural, and it is in this direction that the question of the subject in Foucault's body of work refers to a review of previous stages, being raised from the emergence of the perspective of ethics in his thought and towards the attribution of new meanings or clarification. The need for such review is clear to us, for example, when considering the following excerpt:

But you have always 'stopped' us from discussing the subject in general.

– No, I did not 'stop'. I may have made some inadequate formulations. What I refused was

precisely the creation of a premature theory of the subject – which could be made, for example, in phenomenology or existentialism –, and that, from such theory the question of knowing how, for example, how such type of knowledge was possible. I tried to show how the subject constituted himself, in one or another given form, being mad or not, delinquent or not, through a given number of practices that were the truth games, practices of power, etc. (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 274-275)

Addressing the relationship of Foucault's thought with phenomenology does not fit within the limitations of this article[1], but we want to emphasize that the question of the subject in Foucault still seems as a matter to be addressed. Moments before this statement, in the same interview, Foucault answers a question on the issue of the priority of care for the others in the care for the self among Ancient Greeks, implying the priority of the relationship with the other for the relationship with the self, stating the following: "One should not pass the care of others in front of the care of the self; the care of self comes ethically firstly, to the extent *the relationship with the self is ontologically primary*" (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 271, emphasis added). A statement with undeniable Heideggerian influences.

Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say, using Gerard Lebrun (1985) – but not taken literally – that Foucault was more interested in the historical conditions of world and self experience, as we said; or in historical ontologies, and not in the general ontology of human existence.

In this sense, he also states in the same interview:

if now I am actually interested in the ways through which the subject actively constitutes himself, through the practices of the self, these practices are not, however, something created by the individual. Such practices are schemas he finds in his culture and that are proposed, suggested, imposed to him by his culture, society and social group. (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 276)

As we intend to highlight, this statement is placed in field of problematization of ethics in his thought but it is not restricted to it, encompassing the set of his works. In Foucault's own words (1984/2004d):

I tried to locate three major types of problems: the problem of truth, the problem of power, and the problem of individual conduct. These three domains of experience can only be understood in relation to each other, not independently. What bothered me about the previous books is that I considered the

first two experiences without taking the third one into account. (p. 253)

From this excerpt we believe that it is worth repeating that these areas "can only be understood in relation to each other, and cannot be understood without the others". Therefore, the point is to not restrict the practice of the care for the self or the active prospect of the subject in the constitution of the self to the moral field, but also in its relationship with knowledge and power, which form and are formed by the subject in a single process: this is the movement (Foucault, 1984/2004c), subject and object forming themselves together; something that, to us, would be a way of rewriting the double empirical transcendental phenomenology.

As we shall see, this new perspective is full of consequences for both the reconsideration of the meaning of Foucault's body of work, and for the guidance of empirical research on practices in social institutions considering his philosophy.

The archeology of knowledge

In his initial great books, Foucault conducts the archeology of knowledge. But, what is archaeology and what is knowledge? These terms have very precise meanings in Foucauldian vocabulary. First, it is critical to comprehend that, for Foucault, *knowledge* is not merely a science. Science would be a part of knowledge, but knowledge is not restricted to science. On the contrary, a *knowledge*, such as the knowledge about *madness* (the first object of his archeology) includes concepts from several categories: legal, scientific, philosophical, religious, and so on. Foucault's method does not separate each of these concepts; on the contrary, it places them side by side, to make their structure of discursive possibility emerge from their pure positivity (cf. Deleuze, 1986/2005, p. 61). The "logic" that organizes them or that composes a certain type of subject corresponding to a particular type of object.

In this sense, an *a priori* notion of subject is not discarded to be taken by a previous objectivity; the first step is to examine how "the subject and object 'form and transform each other', one in relation to the other and one depending on the other" (Foucault, 1984/2004c, p. 237). Thus, two types of distinct but interdependent processes would exist: processes of subjectivation and processes of objectivation. Subject of knowledge and object of study as mutual results that were formed concomitantly.

This is how Foucault deconstructs universalist notions such as *man*, *madness* or *sexuality*, he dispels the aspiration of universality through historical arguments that can be dated and analyzed. In *The archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault (1969/2013) shows precisely that there is no absolute continuity in the development of knowledge (*the* economics, *the* anatomy, *the* psychiatry). At every historical discontinuity, i.e., each change of order of thought, it is possible that changes occur in the *concepts*

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1   For more specific discussion of Foucault's relationship with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, particularly on the notion of subject, cf. Furlan (2009, 2017).

to be thought, the *objects* to be studied, the *enunciative methods* to be used, the *strategies and methods* to be developed and practiced (Foucault, 1969/2013). Because during each period a new form of *problematization* would exist (Revel, 2004), new possibilities and limits of sayability and visibility (Furlan, 2015, p. 323), different problems and, therefore, different strategies for addressing them. Archaeology would thus allow the "historical" analysis of the succession of several "*historical a priori*", from which the concepts would become possible.

Briefly, we shall see the types of archeology performed by Foucault.

Foucault's first three major books present three different types of archaeology. The first, an archaeology of psychiatry and psychopathology; the second, an archaeology of medical clinic (focusing on anatomy and physiology); the third, an archaeology of human sciences. For this discussion, we will focus on the first and third books.

In *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Foucault (1972/2014), intends to conduct an archaeology of psychiatry and psychopathology. The author moves back to the Renaissance and goes through the Classical Age (the Age of Reason) until reaching the Modern Age (the three distinct historical *a priori*). He finds a different "experience" of what is madness in each of these periods. Thus, the term "madness" has very different meanings in each of these spaces and times, and what is *thinkable*, *sayable* and *visible* in each is also very changeable.

In the Renaissance, Foucault identifies an experience of madness as "the other side of reason", which is sometimes seen as a divine messenger of unfathomable truths. It is considered a "tragic" experience of madness. A deep historical cut is made and, during the Age of Reason, the "mad person" will be confined in internment environments, but now with other symbols of "unreason" (beggars, poor and orphans, for example). The category of *madness* is then dissolved in a more general one – the "unreason", which needs to be reformed. This is a clearly *moral* experience of madness to Foucault, since it is delineated as substance to be reformed.

The pathologizing of madness thus occurs in the Modern Age. Madness is no longer placed onto beggars and orphans, it is treated specifically and solitarily in asylums and psychiatric hospitals. Such experience brings some continuity from the former (because it is still a moral experience), but it carries critical differences: the mad person is now mentally ill. This person must be treated, reformed and normalized by medical and psychiatric knowledge. This is where the mad person "is designated as being the Other, the Foreigner, the Excluded", "strange in the fraternal similarities of men among themselves" (Foucault, 1972/2014c, p. 134). The constituting gestures of modern psychiatry are both of "exile and election" (Foucault, 1972/2014, p. 107).

Foucault presents the history of a specific figure of rationality to us: a type of reason that imposed itself at the expense of the marginalization of its most intimate negativity (madness, which is surrounded in the "interior of an exterior" – psychiatric asylums). The reason that defines what is normal and that pushes away, geographically and morally, the mad person from those who are sane, as had been done with the lepers. Thus, *Madness and Civilization* can be described as a "critical history of reason" (Nalli, 2006, p. 153); but more than this, this book "is precisely the historical description of the structural conditions that enabled the separation between reason and madness, as well as the definition of the latter as a mental illness" (Nalli, 2006, p. 90). Psychiatry does not appear as the "immanent development" of concepts, as the continuous approximation to an ultimate truth, but as the constitution of a knowledge that states *truths* about individuals (about their normativity, for example) and performs non-discursive practices that have effects (political, as one may argue) on them. This is not a reason that is developed by itself, on an intrinsic and teleological self-mediation; this reason is a datable figure of rationality that participates in a time and space, of an *episteme* and culture.

In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Foucault (1966/1999) undertook an archaeology of the human sciences, as explicitly stated on the book's subtitle. In this book, just as he'd done with the previous one, he makes the journey from the Renaissance until the Modern Age and going through the Enlightenment, the three *episteme* to be studied. According to Foucault (1966/1999), "in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (p. 230). Once again he states that there are different sayability and visibility rules in each *episteme* , and that each knowledge is constructed in distinct ways. The focus of the work are the mutations of three epistemic regions during the passage from the Age of Reason to modernity: general grammar (which was substituted by philology), natural history (which was substituted by biology) and the history of wealth (which was substituted by political economy).

Before this process, Foucault describes the *episteme* of the Renaissance as the period of *similitude.* Man thought the world under the principle of the similitude between processes and things that were very distant at times. For example, the themes of the growth of herbaceous plants and the growth of hair were approximated due to the resemblance between the capillarity of both processes (Foucault, 1966/1999). All knowledge within this *episteme* are formulated using similar schemes. During this period the world is considered an "open book" to be decoded and interpreted, and the representations would not reside outside of things, they would be fused in them. For example, one can cite how, in encyclopedias produced during this period, the detailed description of a given animal species was made alongside the exposure of myths in which it appeared,

which function it served in each myth or sacred story, and so on (Foucault, 1966/1999). In this *episteme*, there is no clear differentiation in exposition rules of the relationship between truth and object, representation and thing: things told about the words, and the words about things. The world is a set of arranged signs amenable to the interpretation of a careful eye to its analog matches. Therefore, the analogies between things of the world had to be discovered, things that were taken as natural signs among which there were specifically human signs present in their narratives. As Foucault states, this was the period when there was no separation between the words and the things, as the original title of the book suggests (*Les mots et les choses*, if translated literally it would be *The words and the things*).

During the Age of Reason this very transformation occurs, the separation between the signs and things. This period focuses on the search for clear and transparent representations capable of expressing the correspondence between the things and words that represent them. Here, the representation is understood as being outside the phenomenal world – the representation is a way of thought to formulate concepts (true or not, clear or not) about the world. However, the possibility of telling the truth about the phenomenon would exist if the representation was methodological and intuitively clear enough, as in mathematics, according to Descartes. This occurred because the subject of knowledge was not taken as an existential problem, being seen only as the vessel for the true speech: as long as ideas were clear, distinct and self-evident things would be well represented or known. One could argue that for classical thought – although there is a separation between words and things and the words are no longer seen as natural signs of things themselves, inserted between them, but, having removed such signs from them, they acquire the function of representing them – a correlation between representation and the thing represented may exist: the word as a mirror of the world.

The change conducted in the passage to the Modern Age is exactly the loss of the specularity and correspondence between word and thing, because until then mankind was only the place to operate the speech, but now will become a question in itself, providing a background of opacity to representations that were possibly translucent. The representative function thus loses its "innocence" or possibility of transparency, as long as it was designed in accordance with the rules of the true thinking. This is precisely the questioning of human conditions of representation that marked the emergence of man in the new *episteme*. The defining expression of this *episteme*, "man is a recent invention", required many explanations from Foucault. Although this phrase caused many reactions, its meaning was simple: to problematize the background which sustains the representations of knowledge and that, in fact, represent the condition and the object of all human sciences.

According to Foucault, this questioning was prepared by the development of the knowledge of three empirical elements: work, life and speech. These elements (work, life and language) are what formed this basis that functioned as the exterior condition of possibility of representation itself and that gave birth to man as an epistemological question. Which means that, if heretofore representations functioned in a translucent form, they now refer to exterior elements for the composition of their meaning. This is the movement that leads to the surfacing of political economy from the concept of *labor*; of biology from the concept of *life*; of philology from the concept of *language*. Foucault then notes that these knowledges represent almost absolute *othernesses* for representations since they appear as transcendental horizons unreachable by words themselves: it is the *thoughtless* that lies on the horizon of every modern knowledge, which refers to the origins and the indeterminate field of the modes of production (labor), life and language.

According to three areas, the Humanities were born from the intimate bonding of studied types of knowledge: a sociological area (linked to economics), a psychological area (linked to biology), and an anthropological area (linked to linguistics). Each of these conceptual levels now bears within them the concept of *man*, who shall be the place of the projection of knowledge from economics, biology and linguistics as the *experiences* of their objects (labor, life, language), which will be expressed, precisely, as "experienced representation". This is the man who works, lives and speaks. The objects of positive knowledge of economics, biology and linguistics are projected from the experience of this man. Before this period man was not a question. Now he functions as a "paradoxical" element within the concepts of these human sciences: he is, at the same time, the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge due to representing (thinking) from these empirical elements that constitute him (the mode of production, the history of life and the history of language). Therefore, Foucault (1966/1999) could claim that:

> In Classical thought, the personage for whom the representation exists, and who represents himself within it, recognizing himself therein as an image or reflection, he who ties together all the interlacing threads of the 'representation in the form of a picture or table' – he is never found to be in that table himself. Before the end of the eigtheenth century, *man* did not exist. (pp. 424-425).

From where his famous statement that "man is a recent invention" can be found. When philosophically studied in the Modern Age, this man will be at the heart of the main discussions. Everything will go through it.

It is in this sense that the category of *lived* will surface for the "analytic of finitude" as a key concept: it is in the lived that the originating formations of meaning occur, it is in it that all historical contents that underlie

the subjectivity of an individual are loaded and unloaded, it is in it that gives this unbreakable paradox between the empirical (labor, life and language conditions that compose it) and transcendental (after all, man is the one who thinks, i.e., is the condition that allow them to be thought about) occur. From this logic Foucault is able to diagnose that the ultimate objective of the "analytical finitude" (phenomenologies) considers a circularity between the empirical and transcendental character of the meaning of man's experience. The empirical character that constitutes in its history the man who lives, works and speaks, but who is, at the same time, transcendental, because this subject, thus historically constituted, is also the condition of this process. Therefore, there is a double process that always emerges, under the shadows of the object of study: the so-called "double empirical-transcendental". This action is an endless zigzag that represents the basic concept of *man*, but that will never be overcame if such concept is not rethought and deconstructed. This is the reason why some claim that "the true objection to positivism" is not in the analysis of what has been lived, but in an apparently "absurd" question: "this question would be to ask if man truly exists" (Foucault, 1966/1999, pp. 443-444). This is Foucault's archeologic diagnosis about our episteme.

The result of such archaeology of human sciences is similar to the previous archaeology: the same could be said about it because the historical ruptures between different historical epistemes are surfaced by it, not the immanent development of the concepts of a given science. Furthermore, we can affirm that such sciences are not developed as "improvements" of previous models. For example, contemporary biology is not the improved continuation of the natural history practiced during the Classical Age because its categories are different: its questions are different, its objects are different, its coping strategies are different. Shortly, they are located within two completely different epistemes. Foucault shows us that these knowledges, which are strange to us, were as rigorous and thorough as our own types of knowledge. These knowledges were under the possibilities of condition of another episteme.

The current rationality is focused on another configuration – the one that has *man* as its center and unattainable end. This *episteme* is also historical and may also face an end. As every other *episteme*.

The archeology of knowledge thus shows a transmutation of the practice of reason. The horizon of this practice does not consider a transcendental subject, but the transcendentality of an *episteme*, of a historical *a priori*.

The genealogy of power

After *The archaeology of knowledge*, Foucault's theoretical design underwent a major mutation. The focus is no longer on performing the archeology of knowledge, but the genealogy of powers. Based on the analysis of several works by Nietzsche, Foucault expressed what is the genealogical method in a programmatic text of 1971 – thus, two years after the publication of *The Archaeology of knowledge* and four years before the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1971 /2014). Genealogy is the rejection of the notion of "origin", of the notion of transcendental *a priori* and of any teleology. Therefore, the goal of a genealogy-like method is to strip itself of any concepts related to the unit or homogeneity of history: no founding origin, no ultimate goal; no immanent development of concepts, no consciousness that would lie behind historical phenomena. On the contrary, the genealogist must find, "under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad of events through which – thanks to which, against which – they were formed" (1971/2014, p. 62). Thus, the genealogist cannot consider the so-called conceptual unit (*the* author, *the* West, *the* work, etc.) as the final form of a pre-defined history, the genealogist must excavate precisely where the unit or homogeneity may deceive us, finding thousands of accidents and nuances, and the hostile game of forces that allowed its appearance. Moreover, "the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events" (Foucault, 1971/2014, p. 62). The self as an "empty synthesis" – genealogy as the emergence of its most intimate ruptures. The similarities or incorporation of the previous archaeological project can be noted here, but the inflection point is given by events and forces that cross each conceptual game that used to be the focus of the archaeological research about knowledge.

In the particular case of power, genealogy investigates how different devices operate on individuals and change their bodies and their constitution as subjects. For Foucault, "power has no homogeneity: it is defined by singularity, by the other singular points through which it goes" (Deleuze, 1986/2005, p. 35). This is how Foucault exposes the concept in his programmatic text, to study how the powers are exerted: " to address the question of power through an analysis of 'how' it is, and then operate several critical shifts regarding the assumption of a fundamental 'power'. It is to consider *power relations* as the analysis object and not a *power*" (Foucault, 1995b, p. 242). *Power* not as a universal substance, but as a network of multiple strategies through several points are influenced.

The relationship between body and "soul" (or rather, subjectivity) thus becomes conspicuous in his works. As he stated in the same 1971 text:

> The body is the inscribed surface of events, . . . the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of provenance, is thus situated within the articulation

of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body. (Foucault, 1971/2014, p. 65)

In his first genealogical book, *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1975/2013), Foucault theorizes that a change in power relations has occurred from the Classical to Modern Age: previously, the exercise of power was based on the image of the Sovereign, in his presence and decrees; now, power is capillary and microscopic, affecting the bodies infinitesimally: "The constitution of this new microscopic and capillary power is what led the social body to expel elements such as the court and the character of the king" (Foucault, 1975/2014, p. 215). This new economy of power discards the need for an Absolute figure to transmit and exert it, power is now administered within minimal relations, it has no subject and is not "owned" by anyone.

Foucault thus notes the emergence of a disciplinary society, in which the bodies of individuals would be watched, monitored, measured and inspected at all times to form a normalized interiority – a correct "soul". Therefore, For Foucault "it is not a matter of conceiving, as some branches of classical metaphysics, a separated soul from the body in a double process of relationship, but rather a notion of soul directly created on the body, considering the political interests concentrated over it" (Silveira & Furlan, 2003, p. 176). The focus is on examining the establishment of subjects subjected by power.

Foucault investigates the "submissiveness process of bodies", the way bodies are affected by power. The main analyzed device is Bentham's Panopticon, which established a new structure of visibility in the field of power. Foucault (1977/2014) summarizes the geographical structure of the Panopticon in an interview:

> The principle is simple: on the periphery runs a building in the shape of a ring; in the centre of the ring stands a tower pierced by large windows that face the inside wall of the ring; the outer building is divided into cells, each of which crosses the whole thickness of the building. These cells have two windows: one corresponding to the tower's windows, facing into the cell; the other facing outside, thereby enabling light to traverse the entire cell. One then needs only to place a guard in the central tower, and to lock into each cell a mad, sick or condemned person, a worker or a pupil. (p. 319)

The question of seeing and being seen receives new meanings here: a founding asymmetry between who monitors and who is monitored. The "eye of power" works all the time, watching those who are "abnormal", in acts or in power, in their cells, whether they are in a prison, hospital or school. Foucault presents the structural and functional regularity between these different spaces, which apparently are greatly distinct, in *Discipline and Punish*. In each of them, however, power is marking the bodies, telling individuals how they must be, how they must act, move, think. Thus, these different "large disciplinary machinery" (such as military barracks, schools, workshops, prisons) are "machines that allow the comprehension of the individual, knowing what he is, what he does, what can be done to him, or where he must be placed, how to situate him among others" (Foucault, 1978/2004a, p. 55).

In Foucault, power introduces positivity aspects, it does not merely castrate or prohibits: power creates realities. Therefore, it can be argued that for Foucault, "the primordial aim of the society of normalization, more than suppressing an individual's conduct, is to influence, drive and conduct him through mechanisms, so he can be submitted to a particular position under certain historical knowledge/powers" (Silveira & Furlan, 2003, p. 190). Thus, the role that many types of knowledge have in this normalization of bodies can be understood: psychiatry (again), psychology, psychoanalysis, pedagogy, and so on.

Performing a new analysis of this multiple network of powers, Foucault (1976/2010) comes to new conclusions in his following book. Considering the theme of *sexuality* in our society, Foucault exposes what he calls "repressive hypothesis", i.e., the general hypothesis according to which, in our society, power has always acted with the intention of censoring and suppressing men in their sexuality, obstructing certain discourses about it, prohibiting and treating the subject of sex as *sinful* or *non-prudish*. Foucault will then deconstruct such hypothesis, showing that, in fact, the correct is the reverse: there is a "super production of social and cultural knowledge" of a "collective knowledge about sexuality" (Foucault, 1978/2004b, p. 60). "What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret" (Foucault, 1976/2010, p. 42). Foucault shows how several institutions (e.g., the Catholic Church) and types of knowledge (such as psychoanalysis and sexology) incite individuals to expose their most complete intimacy (their "truth"), and such intimacy is always in a fundamental relationship with the internal and mysterious sexuality. This was named by Foucault as the *dispositif of confession*.

However, confession works within a larger *dispositif*, which Foucault calls *dispositif of sexuality*:

> It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies. the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power. (Foucault, 1976/2010, pp. 116-117)

Through this reasoning Foucault (1978/2004b) could argue that, over the last few centuries, the West does not deny sexuality; on the contrary, it "introduces and organizes from it an large and complex device that deals with the constitution of individuality, of subjectivity" (p. 76). In the West, the experience of subjectivity would be tied to the question of sex: the true and enigmatic sex would be one that would reveal the most intimate and inaccessible truth of the subject, to which not even he has conscious access.

Foucault (1976/2010) thus notes the appearance of a fundamental concept linked to this question: the concept of *population*, on which several types of knowledge related to the sexual and vital intimacy of individuals will be placed: longevity, mortality, statistics regarding, for example, the number of children per couple, and so on. These are "geography" and statistics knowledge that will have a strategic role in the exercise of power.

Therefore, there are two sides of *dispositifs* of power: one studied in detail since *Discipline and Punish*, focused on the individual's body, the other presented in the first volume of the trilogy of *The History of sexuality*, which also focuses on the set of bodies. On the one hand, the various forms of "submitting" and investigating the bodies in their individuality, called *political anatomy* by Foucault; on the other, the constant measurements of various "variables" regarding the population, which is named *biopolitics*. "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed" (Foucault, 1976/2010, p. 152). *Biopower* is the name given by Foucault to this "power over life". The onset of a capillary power is named *microphysics of power*. Power is now exercised in the minutiae and its ultimate goal is to manage and control life, in its general and individual aspects.

Sexuality is a strategic *dispositif* for power when considering this notion, because both political anatomy and bio-politics can be exerted from certain knowledge-power and through everything that is related to sexuality: both the management of individual bodies, dictating the rules and joys of confession, imposing the mark of the true sex, and the management of the population, of groups of living individuals through statistical and geographical data. Sexuality, not as a universal essence, but as a historical *dispositif* of power, would thus be the key for the capillary control of individuals' bodies and subjectivities, whether they are considered by themselves or as a social group.

The genealogy of power is a form of dissolving, yet again, the notion of subject in an intricate network of several strategies of power. Here, the types of knowledge have a close relationship with these strategies and cannot be separated from them, since only an epistemological analysis could be artificial. "It would only be in this tense articulation between knowledge and power that the notion of *truth* would finally appear, losing any sign of absoluteness and intangibility, as a certain philosophical

tradition had established previously" (Birman, 2000, p. 25). The *games of truth* thus surface again, games in which the truth conditions establish and form both the subject and the object of knowledge. The truth, for the genealogist Foucault, is always an exercise in knowledge-power.

This allowed Birman (2000) to state that, "from a strictly philosophical point of view, the main question found in Foucault's theoretical project would be the deconstruction of the tradition of the philosophy of the subject" (p. 85). In the archeologies, the subject of knowledge is dissolved into a history full of discontinuities; in the genealogy, the political subject is deconstructed and formed within an infinitesimal network of knowledge and practices. The "subject" is now theorized as a byproduct of multiple points of knowledge-power. Through this analysis of power, Foucault shows the body invested with history and power. The subject appears more as the subjection (to history, to politics) than as the world founding synthetic activity.

The aesthetics of existence

The project presented by Foucault in his first book in *The History of sexuality* was to thoroughly examine the historical constitution of this *dispositif* of sexuality. However, as is known, his project changed radically. His last two books (the last volumes of *The History of sexuality*) completely drifted away from this initial project, starting to focus on the investigation of the "techniques of the self", the "the care of the self" in Greco-Roman culture (Foucault, 1984/1998, 1985).

The techniques of the self would regard certain types of operations that individuals can perform on their own, in a given period and society, on their own body, their thoughts and their conduct, "to produce a transformation and a modification in them, and to achieve a certain state of perfection, happiness and purity" (Foucault, 1981/2004, p. 95). The processes of subjectivation are then studied in a new form. As stated by Furlan (2013):

> By studying the canonical forms of knowledge-power during his genealogical phase, Foucault focuses only on their effects on us. Only after analyzing the Ethical dimension he introduced a positive ingredient in his analysis of subjectivity, in other words, considering the perspective of what a subject can do for his own life or existence, and not only from the perspective of what the other makes of him. (pp. 94-95)

That is,

> Foucault's question seems to invert: if it is true that the forms of subjectivation produce, when making them objective, something like subjects, how do these subjects relate with themselves? What

procedures the individual mobilizes to appropriate or reappropriate his own relationship with the self? (Revel, 2004, pp. 82-83)

On such techniques, one could cite the importance of the *writing of self* for the Roman and Hellenistic tradition, which was examined by Foucault (1983/2004) in an article. In this text, the author refers to two practices of the writing of self by Stoic philosophers, such as Seneca and Plutarch: the hypomnemata and correspondence. The hypomnemata would be notes made by an individual to register excerpts from his readings, reflections, questions, doubts and thoughts that may have occurred to him during the day. By registering what is read, the individual incorporates aspects of the authors who were read, but in a reflected and idiosyncratic manner. Correspondence would represent the practice of dialogue through letters: to correspond is to be exposed to the other. Authors used to exchange information about their everyday life, body and spiritual health and techniques of the self to each other through letters and epistles. These are forms one uses to expose himself to the other and assert himself as the subject of the self, of his own life and experience. Writing about the self and for the other – techniques of the self for the improvement of the individual's moral principles (Foucault, 1983/2004).

The relationship between *truth* and *subject* thus gains new boundaries. Studying these "technologies" and "practices" Foucault

isolates two relationships between the subject and truth. The first relationship, more philosophical, interprets the Delphic principle in an epistemological manner; the second, which he proposes to define as spirituality, faces, on the contrary, the problem of the transformations that the subject must conduct in the self to be able to reach the truth. (Adorno, 2004, p. 57)

The access to the truth in modern Western tradition would occur through a specific and well-defined method capable of surfacing clear *certainties* – such as Descartes' proposal. The access to truth would thus be dissociated from the ethical care of the self. When Descartes, in his *Meditations*, develops the method through which doubt can be dispelled, a very specific form of existing is being defined to philosophers: "this way of being is entirely defined by knowledge" (Foucault, 1984/2004b, pp. 279-280), which turns the functions of the care of the self into smaller or even unnecessary issues for the foundation of a scientific method.

Socratic knowledge postulated precisely the contrary: for Ancient Greeks "the relationship with the truth is immediately moral: a notoriously immoral individual cannot know truth" (Adorno, 2004, p. 58). In this sense it can be said that, for the Greeks, "a subject would not have access to the truth if he did not made certain practices in

himself that would enable him to knowing the truth – a work of purification, the conversion of the soul through the contemplation of the soul itself" (Foucault, 1995a, p. 277). This "conversion of the soul" is the subject's work on himself – the care of the self. "The reason for this choice was the desire to live a beautiful life, and to leave a beautiful existence as a legacy. I do not believe we can argue that this type of ethics were an attempt to normalize the population" (Foucault, 1995a, p. 254)

Hence the expression *aesthetics of existence* – the attempt to make the own life a work, a beautiful work of art that can be regarded as such by posterity. A new type of rationality surfaces: no longer the one that removes its negativities (the mad person, for example) to be able to present itself as light and positivity, or, no longer the rationality that uses these negativities from a normative power point of view; but a reason that, only through the careful *unfolding* of itself, acquires the power to tell the truth. "A type of philosophy no longer considers the metaphysical discourse about the divine truth of the soul, now considering a given practice of truth that is also a practice of the self" (Gros, 2004, p. 162).

A new relationship between subject and truth: in the aesthetics of existence, one must incarnate and be the truth to have the required dignity to spell it. Opposing Socrates to Descartes, reason emerges as no longer being interested in an impersonal method that separates the spelling of truth from the practice of the subject on himself. This is a postulate of dissolution of the Western dissociation between *logos* and *ethos* to which Foucault returns. Truth is not considered a logical category, but an ethical category.

Foucault takes two forms of embodying the truth as examples – the Stoic and cynical models. For Stoics it represents the care for the self with temperance from a continuous reflection about one's own actions and conduct, as we have seen about the writing of the self. With cynics, on the contrary, "it is exploding the truth in life as a scandal" (Gros, 2004, p. 163), because they needed to "make directly readable on the body the explosive and wild presence of a naked truth, to turn the very existence into a provocative theatrical play of the scandal of truth" (Gros, 2004, p. 163). Foucault thus exposes us to two distinct forms of subjectivation, both seeking the truth not as a logical category, but as the practical result of a personal asceticism.

Therefore, a space within the *games of truth* may exist, a certain space of freedom where individuals would not only reflect about the true and false, but also *constitute themselves* as ethical subjects.

Final considerations

We covered Foucault's theoretical route in his three "phases": first, the so-called archeology of knowledge; then, works on the genealogy of power; and finally, the examination of techniques and conducts of the self. By

focusing on the examination of the different techniques of the self and the practices individuals conduct on themselves in Ancient Greece and Rome, Foucault's approach about the subject is given new contours. The analysis is no longer limited to diagnosing that knowledge and power act on individuals and constitute them as subjects of knowledge and power, the diagnosis now tries to examine how subjects constitute and recognize themselves. This represents a challenge that goes beyond the circumscription of this question in Foucault's last works, interrupted by his death, leading us to a specific review of his previous works, since the recognition of the self only occurs in a constituted field of knowledge and power.

This is the same procedure that led Foucault to discuss the idea of knowledge-power, i.e., all knowledge implies a particular form of power and vice versa, but now stating that all human conduct – social in principle – is composed by these three dimensions, completed by Foucault through the research of ethical behavior: knowledge-power-self.

More precisely, in addition to the already consecrated critical perspective of power in his work, we ask: how to discuss the perspective of the possibilities of subjectivation that are not restricted to the mere reproduction of strategies of power or the resistance to it, and that, at the same time, only occur when immanent to such strategies? Alternatively, how to conceptualize these spaces of freedom, mentioned by Foucault, which are immanent to fields of knowledge-power?

Such question can be illustrated using two examples from Foucault himself. The first, from the perspective of power, when he says:

> I do not believe that the only possible point of resistance to political power – understood precisely as the state of domination – lies in the relation with the self. I say that governability implies the relationship of the self with the self, meaning that in this notion of governability I consider the set of practices through which it is possible to establish, define, organize and instrumentalize the strategies that individuals, in their freedom, may have towards others. These are free individuals trying to control, determine and define the freedom of others and, to do so, they have certain instruments to govern others. This is thus based on the freedom, in the

relation of the self with the self and in relation with the other (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 286).

In our society, Foucault (1984/2004b) completes, there are numerous games of power which are not as predetermined as in societies where such games are better defined and closed. The more freedom, "the greater the desire of people to determine the conduct of others" (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 286).

The second example, from the perspective of the specific concept of subject, when he says that the subject is

> a form, and above all, that form is not always identical to itself. The relationships you have with yourself are not the same as the ones you have when you become a political subject to vote or make a speech during an assembly, or when you seek to fulfill your desire in a sexual relationship. Undoubtedly, there are relations and interferences between these different forms of subject; however, we are not in the presence of the same type of subject. In each case different forms of relationship with the self are established and exerted. (Foucault, 1984/2004b, p. 275)

The consequences of this new perspective about the question of the subject complement the archaeological and genealogical research on knowledge and institutions, insofar as they imply a kind of diplopia that, at the same time, includes the objectivation process of the subject in a field of knowledge and power (of normative behavior) and the process of subjectivation of these objective fields (established knowledge and normalizing institutions).

Or, even further, the highlight of this new theoretical perspective, opened and caused by the question of ethics in the thought of Foucault, has direct implications on the empirical research on processes of subjectivation in all social institutions: school, hospital, family, justice, psychiatry and even prison. The critical point here is not only emphasizing the possibility of resistance in every knowledge-power relationship, which seems given to us from the very beginning of Foucault's works, but the possibility of a particular practice of the subject about the self or the other that not only reproduces the prospect of the knowledge-power imposed on the self or the other, but a particular constitution through which the subject and social reality go through, not merely reproducing its current forms.

A questão do sujeito em Foucault

Resumo: Apoiados em uma demarcação sintética sobre as três fases das pesquisas de Michel Foucault, procuramos destacar a importância e necessidade de uma revisão da questão do sujeito em sua obra, em particular após suas pesquisas sobre a problemática da ética na Grécia e Roma antigas. Concluímos que essa revisão traz uma consequência importante para orientar pesquisas na psicologia ou ciências humanas, de modo geral.

Palavras-chave: Foucault, sujeito, subjetivação, ética.

La question du sujet dans la pensée de Foucault

Résumé: Basé sur une démarcation synthétique des trois phases de la recherche de Michel Foucault, on a souligné l'importance et la nécessité d'examiner la question du sujet dans ses travails, notamment après ses recherches sur l'éthique en Grèce et à Rome antiques. Nous concluons que cette examen a des conséquences importantes pour orienter des recherches en psychologie ou en sciences humaines en général.

Mots-clés : Foucault, sujet, subjectivation, éthique.

La cuestión del sujeto en Foucault

Resumen: Apoyados en una demarcación sintética sobre las tres fases de las investigaciones de Michel Foucault, procuramos destacar la importancia y necesidad de una revisión de la cuestión del sujeto en su obra, en particular después de sus investigaciones sobre la problemática de la ética en la Grecia y Roma antiguas. Concluimos que esa revisión tiene consecuencia importante para la orientación de investigaciones en la psicología o ciencias humanas, de modo general.

Palabras clave: Foucault, sujeto, subjetivación, ética.

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