Foucault, Historicism and Political Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This thesis defends an ontological and epistemological account of Michel Foucault's post-structuralist philosophy, to argue that political philosophy needs to take into account the historical and political contingency of subjectivity and discourse. I show that by addressing the historical and political contingency of knowledge, Foucault's work overcomes the flaw of foundational epistemology in political philosophy, which treats true discourse as universal and disinterested. In doing so I hope to have to refuted the mainly positivistic and humanist schools of thought that lay claim to universal and foundationalist notions, by demonstrating the extent to which their misgivings about Foucault's work are informed by and founded upon an unjustified a-historicism.

The thesis is composed of three chapters, the first of which deals with an ontology of the subject, the second, with an ontology of social relations, and the last with epistemology. In each chapter I use dialectical analysis to reveal how interests necessarily mediate subjectivity, social relations, and knowledge. The first two chapters defend Foucault's conception of power, by way of an analysis of the relations between Foucault's work and Sartre's existential phenomenology. I show how both Foucault and Sartre successfully address the problem of historicism for political philosophy with their respective conceptions of human freedom. The final chapter defends Foucault's conception of the relations between power and discourse, to show how it overcomes the a-historicism of universal, foundational epistemology.

These three chapters demonstrate the importance of accounting for historicism in political philosophy. Claims to universal interest, because knowledge is conditioned by conflicts of interest, often mask political domination. It is important, then, to remember, in political philosophy, that knowledge is evaluative and interested, reflecting historically and politically mediated evaluations. One should be suspicious of 'natural facts', used to justify actions or beliefs, thereby masking the choices that inform them. I have used the work of Michel Foucault to motivate this claim.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will defend an ontological and epistemological account of Michel Foucault's post-structuralist philosophy and use this to argue that political philosophy needs to take into account the historical and political contingency of subjectivity and knowledge. I argue this against political theory that abstracts from historical and political contingency by citing universal interests and disinterested claims to the truth. Throughout the argument, I will explain Foucault's conceptions of power and knowledge with reference to the historical philosophical contexts of humanism, existential phenomenology, structuralism, Marxism and Nietzschean genealogy, out of which Foucault's post-structuralism developed. The dialectical interpretation of Foucault I take involves a rejection of metaphysics of presence, Cartesian dualism, Kant's distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena,* and the distinction between facts and values. Due to ongoing temporal flux, identity is never discrete. Mind and body, intuition and conceptualisation, knowledge and purpose are co-constitutive. Through Foucault, I argue that both subjectivity and knowledge are constituted historically, in relations of power. Who we are and what we know is constructed in relation to our desires; our desires, in turn, are historically constructed through our ongoing interactions with the world, others and knowledge.

My argument is divided into three chapters, the first two dealing with ontology, and the last with epistemology. In the first chapter I use Foucault's work to argue, in terms of dialectical intentionality, that the identity of the subject is constituted in relation to her ongoing interactions with the world. I explain Foucault's conception of subjectivity by contrasting it against Sartre's understanding of transcendent freedom to show how, in light of the problems I draw about his earlier work from the exchange between he and Sartre, Foucault came to abandon the a-historical discourse-constructivism of his Archaeological work. In the second chapter I will show how this move leads Foucault to theorise freedom in terms of reciprocally generated relations of power. I explain Foucault's analysis of relations between individuals in terms of dialectical negation. With Foucault, I argue that one's ongoing, changing relations with others involve conflicts of

interest, which are constitutive of one's identity, yet this need not rule out freedom. In fact, such freedom assures us of the historical and political contingency of subjectivity. This is a problem for political philosophy that abstracts from such contingency with a pretension to a-historical universality. Lastly, I use the methodology and ontology developed in the first two chapters, to defend Foucault's conception of power/knowledge. I argue that knowledge is historically generated in relations of power. This entails that knowledge is never impartial. Foucault recognises the necessity of continually re-evaluating our beliefs as things change. Accepting the historical and political contingency of knowledge, his work overcomes the flaw of foundational epistemology in political philosophy, which treats true discourse as universal and disinterested.

CHAPTER ONE: DIALECTICAL INTENTIONALITY

In this chapter, I draw from a debate between Foucault and Sartre the explanation that it was as a result of problems with its a-historicism that Foucault came to abandon the discourse-constructivism of his earlier work. To demonstrate the need for historicism in political philosophy, I trace the development of the philosophical problem of the constitution of subjectivity that brought Foucault and Sartre to focus on this issue. In doing so I motivate an historicist ontology of subjectivity, which I will draw on in the following chapters. The chapter is divided into three parts, the first comprising Foucault's Archaeological critique of Sartre's existential phenomenology. Here I develop an account of the theoretical divide between structuralism and existential phenomenology, picking out particular objections Foucault levelled against Sartre's work, both directly and by implication. This serves the purpose of identifying important problems facing Foucault following *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* concerning his structuralist methodology, which will help explain the trajectory of his later works, most especially in the development of a theory of power relations which I explore in the following chapter.

The rest of the chapter explores the ontological groundwork done on the question of subjectivity by Sartre. This is done by way of an assessment of Sartre's model of consciousness in relation to the objection levelled against it by Foucault. I will first identify the philosophical problems inherited by existential phenomenology, tracing development of Sartre's ontology through its philosophical history. This will show that Foucault's objections to Sartre were of the very sort Sartre had levelled against Husserl before him, problems going back to the dualist distinction of body and mind in Descartes. I will show that Sartre's ontology of consciousness does not amount to the a-historical model of transcendent consciousness to which Foucault objected. Rather, consciousness is a product of the ongoing historical relations between the subject and her world. This contrast between Sartre and the early Foucault will lay the groundwork for an evaluation of Foucault's later conceptions of freedom and subjectivity in line with Sartre that will be concluded in chapter two.

PART I: FOUCAULT'S ARCHAEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

Although he persistently demonstrates the thread of continuity in the development of his work, Foucault has no qualms about the fact that there have been changes in the direction of his focus, involving a move from a study of the determinations of discourse, to his analysis of techniques of subjectification in Western society. In this section I will be dealing principally with the Foucault of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, as it was at this stage that his theory most contrasted with Sartre's, and it is the exchange between Sartre and Foucault that I draw on to demonstrate the need for historicism in political philosophy, which Foucault himself came to realise. In the radical intellectual and political environment following the 1968 Paris riots, Foucault's structuralist proclamation of the death of man had a major impact in French philosophy, lending impetus to those who rejected the hegemony of bourgeois, individualistic, subject-centred discourses such as existential phenomenology. What was the substance of this critique?

I begin with an examination of the main points of disagreement between the opposing fields of structuralism and phenomenology. In doing so, I indicate the theoretical divide that informed the particular issues separating Foucault and Sartre over questions of freedom and subjectivity. I will then go on to discuss these issues by way of Foucault's structuralist, archaeological assault on the phenomenological account of consciousness, followed by Sartre's response to these criticisms[1]. Foucault's response to the sort of criticisms made by Sartre led to his abandonment of archaeological discourse-centred analysis and a consideration of the historical constitution of discourse. The dialogue with Sartre that I will be considering reveals the indebtedness of Foucault's generation of thinkers to the development of existential phenomenology, despite (or perhaps by way of) their vehement criticism thereof.

[1] I will evaluate these objections to Sartre's ontology of consciousness in detail in the final section of this chapter.

Section One: The opposing disciplines of structuralism and phenomenology

Questions regarding the constitution of subjectivity form the bone of contention between structuralism and phenomenology. This problem arises from Descartes' dualist distinction between body and mind, which posits the priority of the mind as the foundation of knowledge and certainty. This distinction continued in modern philosophy with Kant, who distinguished *noumena* and *phenomena*, positing the *a priori* categories of the mind as the conditions of knowledge. Such philosophy is a-historicist, as it abstracts the knowing subject from the external contingencies that affect her, thus pretending to derive universal principles of knowledge from the necessary features of human consciousness. With Descartes, knowledge comes to be seen in philosophy as grounded in the constituting activity of the knowing subject. The important question, then, over which structuralists and phenomenologists disagree, is how this subject itself is constituted. This becomes important for political theory, as this thesis will show.

Following on from Descartes and Kant, existential phenomenology came to focus on the meaning-giving determination of the subject of thought. Following from Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre developed an ontology of transcendental consciousness, looking at 'man's involvement in the world as the condition of the world's possibility'[2]. Critical of the metaphysical grounds of Cartesian reason, abstracted from actual experience, existential phenomenologists tried to make explicit all that is taken for granted in experience.

Sartre's ontology of the subject serves as a vehicle for analysing the conditions of human history. He identifies the radical freedom of consciousness as the condition of our experience and activity, the subject as the source of intelligibility for any theoretical investigation[3]. The emphasis of existential phenomenology was to show *how* the structure of the consciousness of the subject is integral to any analysis of our collective existence. The world we perceive carries with it the traces of our consciousness, as it

[2] Poster, M. 1984: 26
[3] *Ibid.*

does in Kant's *phenomenal* realm. Structuralists rejected this approach for neglecting the structural conditions of individual consciousness. They criticised existential phenomenology for failing to make a clear break from the dualistic Cartesian subject, by clinging to the notion of a constituting subjectivity, that is, a subject through whom meaning is constituted. Said explains this critically by saying that, prior to the structuralist assault on consciousness, history had been seen to acquire its intelligibility through an 'anthropomorphism projected onto events.'[4]

The work of Ferdinand de Saussure had a powerful influence on the work of many theorists after the Second World War, leading to a multi-disciplinary investigation of the structures through which meaning is produced in society. The consequent development of structuralism gave way to a departure from the analysis of consciousness, which had preoccupied philosophers and social scientists since Kant: the study of the conditions of perception, reason, knowledge and thought[5]. Instead, these conditions were investigated, first through language, and later through cultural practices. Structuralists rejected existential phenomenology's notion of radical human freedom and focused instead on the way that human behaviour is determined by cultural, social and psychological structures. Barthes and Derrida showed how structuralism could be applied to literature, Lacan to psychology, Althusser to Marxism and social analysis, and Foucault to the history of scientific discourse.

With the onset of structuralism, language, the unconscious and social practices began to be analysed in structural terms. This shift brought forth a critique of subjectivity. It showed up the illusion of 'self-presence' perpetuated by a subject-centred discourse[6]. The total sense of discourse came to be seen as depending on circumstances that have nothing to do with the speaker's identity. Said identifies this move away from existential phenomenology in the distinction between the 'I think' and the 'I speak'. Having initiated

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[4] Said, E. "Foucault as an Intellectual Imagination" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader:* 41.
[5] Dreyfuss & Rabinow. 1982: 35.
[6] This makes use of Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence, which neglects to account for the becoming of being, wherein the meaning of a concept, or term, is acquired through its relationship with what it is not. (Derrida, J. 1997: 13).I will show in the first two chapters that this critique of self-presence has in fact had a place in phenomenology since its development by Hegel.

the break away from Descartes' constituting *cogito*[7] and the consequent interiority of knowledge, existentialism gave way to the exteriority of discourse – "language as *being for itself* without subjectivity encompassing it"[8]. Structuralism thus challenged existentialism's Cartesian premise of a unified truth of interiority. No longer was knowledge confined to any particular form of subjectivity, such as that ontologised by Sartre, for example. Knowledge came to be seen by many structuralists as independent of the intervention of human subjectivity. Foucault noted at the time, "this philosophy which since Descartes has given primacy to the subject, is falling apart before our eyes..."[9]

Thus, while Sartre's strategy had been to oppose the notion of an isolated rational subject, instead positing consciousness as an intentional *relation*, he nevertheless continued to see consciousness as playing a role in the formation of knowledge, as I will demonstrate. Structuralists rejected placing the subject as the origin of meaning. The analysis of structure was seen to be a way of bypassing the constituting role of consciousness Descartes had given it, which existential phenomenology was seen to maintain. In the confrontation between structuralism and existential phenomenology, negotiation gave way to revolution, giving rise to the appearance of discontinuity.

Section Two: Foucault's Archaeological assault on Phenomenology

For existentialists, the practical considerations of *Dasein* or *being-for-itself* determine the theoretical strategies we adopt. Foucault's archaeology, on the other hand, aimed to move beyond the philosophical task of investigating the a-historical conditions of consciousness. He rejected the phenomenological attempt to ground the conditions of the possibility of knowledge in the constituting activity of the transcendental subject (albeit a body-subject necessarily involved in the world), opting instead for a model of discourse whereby an emphasis is placed on the constituting role of language. It was for this reason that he developed the archaeological method – as a means of grounding his analysis of social practices and the history of knowledge in the autonomous regularities and

[7] The 'I think' for Descartes, is the basis for certainty, as opposed to experience of the actual world.
[8] Ibid: 56.

determinations of discourse. Over the question of reason in history, Sartre and Foucault initially took opposing directions in their search for an anchor in analysis. While Sartre developed an ontology of constituting consciousness, Foucault developed an account of the autonomous rules of discourse.

With archaeology, Foucault claims, there is no need to pass through the subject in order to analyse the history of knowledge. Foucault challenged the primacy of the subject. Discourse is autonomous from any particular constituent subjectivity[10]. In opposition to Sartre "who made human consciousness the originary subject of all progress and of every practice,"[11] Foucault tries to show that there are rules of formation for objects, concepts and theories which are autonomous from the intentions of the subject. He looks for rules put into operation through discourse "which explain why a certain thing is seen (or omitted); why it is envisaged under such an aspect and analysed at such a level." [12],

Sartre, by contrast, had given a primary role to the radically free subject as the creator of *negatités* through which we give meaning to the world. It is the subject that has a role in shaping her perception from a position of free choice. By contrast, Foucault's archaeological model claims that rule-governed discourse is the primary source of meaning. Rather than positing the subject as the source of intelligibility, Foucault gives discourse this role. He thus puts aside the question of individual agency and desire, or intention, and looks at how the subject is in fact constituted by discourse.

Foucault rejected the idea of any essential human nature which could be derived from experience and understood as the locus of knowledge, arguing "subjects do not first pre-exist and later enter into combat or harmony; subjects emerge on a field of battle and play their roles, there and there alone."[13] Subject positions are the effect of discourse. There is no subject prior to the discourse that constructs it. This position appears to contradict Sartre's notion of transcendental consciousness, which has a prior capacity to evaluate

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[9] Foucault, M. "The Archaeology of Knowledge" in *Foucault Live*. 1989: 60.
[10] Foucault, M. "The Archaeology of Knowledge" in *Foucault Live*. 1989: 59.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid: 60.

given-being from the position of radical freedom. Not only is the subject inevitably situated, but also freedom itself is conditioned, such that there are meanings for Foucault that we cannot help but accept, since discourse is primary and autonomous. There is no authentic self to be liberated since the self is an effect of discourse.[14] Foucault claimed Sartre's project of autonomy "relies upon notions that are not invented by the individual, but which are models he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, his social group."[15] Foucault thus rejects the conception of an a-historical, free subject he finds in Sartre.

Foucault argues that the subject is constructed in relation to the determining effects of discourse. The determining subject, as elucidated by Sartre, is said to be an illusory effect of discursive strategies that both subject man and subjugate man. Models such as Sartre's, which claim to be free from the instantiations of discourse, effectively perpetuate a normalizing image of man by neglecting to take a critical attitude towards these structures. With Archaeology, Foucault attempts a "de-centring that leaves no privilege"[16]. This prevents the normalizing image of human nature perpetuated by phenomenological theories of the subject. Thus Foucault's Archaeology makes the constitution of subjectivity contingent to one's environment.

Foucault's final word on the matter of existentialism is to be found in an interview he gave in the late 60's entitled, "The Birth of the World"[17]:

> [By the death of man] I mean the death of the subject, of the Subject, in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of knowledge (*connaissance*), of Freedom, of Language, of History. One can say that all of Western civilization has been subjugated, and philosophers have only certified the fact by referring all thought and all truth to consciousness, to the Self, to the Subject... We have to recognize the birth of a world where the subject is not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified.

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[13] Ibid: 60.
[14] Armstrong, A. 2003: 10
[15] Foucault, M.: 11.
[16] Foucault, M. *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Disclosed Memoirs of a 19th Century French Hermaphrodite*, 1976: 117.
[17] Foucault, M. "The Birth of the World" in *Foucault Live*. 1989: 67.

Archaeology's aim was "to free history from the grip of phenomenology"[18]. Foucault wished to free philosophy from its subjection to the transcendence of the knowing subject, to stress historical contingency. I will evaluate this structuralist critique with a detailed examination of Sartre's ontology of consciousness in the following part of this chapter, but first let us allow Sartre his response. This will give an indication of how the issue of historicism comes to affect the development of Foucault's thought in his later work following *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

Section Three: Sartre's response to Foucault and structuralism

In seeking to overcome the primacy attached to theories of the subject in existential phenomenology, Foucault resorts to an impersonal language of discourse and strategy. He has admitted that by focusing on the determinations of discourse, he tended to neglect – until later in his work – an effective theorization of the free agency on which discursive and social forces are brought to bear. The complaint of many was that "there is a becoming that structural analysis will never account for, a progression which is... made by a subject."[19] This means that the determinations of discourse cannot be taken to exist outside of the activity of individuals and the consequent unfolding of history. This echoes Sartre's complaint that Foucault freezes history "by replacing the cinema with the magic lantern."[20]

Sartre responded to Foucault's attack on existentialism by criticizing him for attempting to constitute a new ideology, "the last rampart the bourgeoisie could raise against Marx..."[21] Sartre admits that Foucault's work takes an historical approach, uncharacteristic for structuralists who look for the a-historical structures underlying the progression of history, but criticises him for treating discourse as autonomous of human agency. The fact that discourse is the product of an event – speech – is overlooked by Foucault, anxious to avoid the analysis of discourse in terms of a philosophy of

[18] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. 2003: 224.
[19] Foucault, M. "The Archaeology of Knowledge" in Foucault Live, 1989: 59.
[20] Sartre, JP. "Jean Paul Sartre Repond" in *Michel Foucault* (ed. Barry Smart). 1994: 73.
[21] Ibid.

consciousness, or a phenomenology of speech[22]. This echoes Ricouer's complaint against structuralism, that it artificially separates language from speech, as if language is already constituted.[23]

Discourse, argues Foucault, has a determining effect on the constitution of subjectivity. Yet his account of discourse fails to take into account the extent to which it takes effect amongst speaking subjects. Laclau and Mouffe make the point that the purely formal issue of discourse-construction as practiced in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* blocks consideration of the socially governed processes through which subject positions of discourse are filled. Archaeology explains the construction of subject positions, from the position of discourse but not the social context of discourse, involving different individuals interpreting their respective contexts in their individual ways. It fails to negotiate the interrelations between discourse and the socio-historical field[24]. Discourse is presented as autonomous, but this fails to explain how it comes about in the first place, or how it changes.

Sartre's criticism points out that Foucault – in his rejection of humanism – fails to live up to his proclaimed historical perspective. By cutting discourse off from the subject, it is presented as if people coming from particular historical circumstances had never formed it. Sartre would deny one could free philosophy from any constituting activity on the part of the subject. Thus Foucault's archaeological work appears abstracted from historical contingency, just as he had criticized humanism for doing by presenting a universal account of subjectivity. Ironically, Foucault's structuralist project of overcoming the perceived a-historical approach of existential phenomenology, regarding universal theories of subjectivity, ends up relying too heavily on an artificial abstraction of the subject from historical discourse-determination.

It is important to note that the characterisation I have offered of Foucault's Archaeology is not as clear-cut as it may seem. Foucault was aware of the problems of a-historicism I

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[22] McNay, L. *Foucault: A Critical Introduction.* 1994: 83.
[23] Ricouer, P. in McNay, L. *Foucault: A Critical Introduction.* 1967: 78.

have discussed. His reply to these accusations levelled against his work is that he had not denied the possibility of changing discourse; that the set of rules he identified must not be understood as 'a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals'[25] but rather as part of historical context of social existence. Discourse, he argued, is not a set of limitations imposed on the freedom of the subject as much as 'the field on which that freedom is articulated'[26]. Foucault claims merely to have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to the determination of meaning. Yet regardless of this claim, this freedom of which he speaks at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* nevertheless remains un-theorised. When it later surfaces, as we shall see in the following chapter, I will show that it looks a lot like Sartre's conception of freedom.

Having considered Foucault's structuralist critique of existential phenomenology, I will now investigate the substance of this critique. Essentially, this will involve looking in detail at Sartre's ontology of consciousness. Foucault has criticized Sartre for placing a universal, radically free subject at the centre of meaning, for unifying the study of human experience under a model of the determinations of consciousness, and maintaining a Cartesian subject-object dichotomy.

I begin with Sartre's problems with Husserl's phenomenology to show how he addressed these issues with his dialectical ontology of consciousness, with reference to Hegel and Heidegger's concerns with Being. This will give an indication of the substance of the "I-subject" that Sartre was working with. I will then defend Sartre's ontology against the objections identified from Foucault's archaeological critique in the previous part of the chapter, principally in relation to the question, "What is the essence of the pre-discursive subject?" – what properties does Sartre give subjectivity, prior to the effects of the external environment which Foucault had given priority to in discourse? I want to show that, for Sartre, even 'pre-discursive' subjectivity is necessarily tied up in the world and,

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[24] Laclau, E and Mouffe, C. in McNay, L. *Foucault – a critical introduction*. 1994: 76.
[25] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. 2003: 230.
[26] Ibid.

in doing so, I will demonstrate that his ontology in no way posits the dualistic transcendental subject targeted by Foucault's objections in his attack on humanism.

PART II: SARTRE'S HISTORICIST ONTOLOGY

How to theorize the individual agent of history, the basic, primary unit of society? How to extricate the subject from her world, prior to the determinations of her environment? In the next section I will be focusing on the work of Edmund Husserl to show how his phenomenological analysis of intentionality and transcendental subjectivity was confronted by Existentialist concerns with Being. I will thus relate his work to Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and show Sartre brings together existentialism and phenomenology in a universal, yet historicist account of subjectivity, with the phenomenological ontology of *Being & Nothingness*. My concern here is to evaluate how Sartre addressed the problem historicism poses for Husserl's phenomenology, so that I might address the perceived a-historicism Foucault sees in Sartre's work, in the following section. This objections will be revealed to be similar to that levelled by Sartre against Husserl. It is a problem that, in turn, Husserl had tried to address in relation to Descartes.

I will thus begin by tracing the history of Husserl's phenomenological concerns, taken up from Descartes' dualistic model of a transcendental ego and Kant's consequent transcendental idealism. I will then discuss Nietzsche's radical reduction of the phenomenological to the ontological: my subjective experience is my existence. Husserl resisted what he saw to be Nietzsche's radically subjectivist, existentialist conclusions about historical contingency. This led him away from the non-dualistic model of intentionality of his early work to a later transcendental reduction to the *a priori* ego. Dualism, as I showed earlier, posits the mind as distinct from the body, allowing one to theorise a universal subject, distinct from the historically contingent empirical domain. Discussing Husserl's intellectual development will reveal the problem phenomenology faced in relation to the historicism of Existentialism, a problem that Sartre tried to overcome with his ontology of consciousness. Evaluating Sartre's success in overcoming

these problems will enable us to decide what to make of Foucault's later criticisms against his "a-historical" subject, in the final section of this chapter.

Section One: Husserl's Phenomenology

The term phenomenology is related to a Kantian distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena*. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, which are appearances, as opposed to objects in-themselves. Phenomenology puts ontology – the study of Being - that which *is* – aside, and instead focuses on things as they appear to us[27].

Phenomenology, thus, does not address the Existentialist question asked by Heidegger: What is the connection between *this* Being and Being (in general)? What can we know about Being through an analysis of the contingent *Dasein*? This question of ontology brings back the issue of external world skepticism. Existentialism develops an account of the ontological characteristics of human being; Phenomenology takes up a solution to the problem of what can be known about being, offered by Kant, and focuses instead only on what is apparent. As Heidegger argues, "Phenomenology is thus precluded from any pronouncements about being which have specific content."[28] As we will see with Husserl, however, the worry of the *noumenal* is never far from mind. Kant had developed an account of the conditions of thought which can be known *a priori – prior*, that is, to the contingencies of experience – which are the logical, transcendental, rational pre-conditions for the intelligibility of *phenomena*. It is from this account that Husserl took his lead, to develop an account of the Transcendental Subject, known with certainty, prior to experience.

Before discussing Husserl, however, it is important to consider Nietzsche's attitude to the problem of a-historicism confronting phenomenology with its recourse to the universal characteristics of human being. Husserl wished to avoid certain existentialist conclusions about the contingency of being made by his predecessor. Looking at Nietzsche's ideas

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[27] Ricouer. 1967: 202.
[28] Heidegger, M. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. 1975: §5.

about the relativity of beliefs to phenomenal experience will help explain why Husserl took recourse to an account of transcendental subjectivity.

Joseph Fell explains how Nietzsche – contrary to Husserl – takes the Kantian limitation of knowledge to the purely phenomenal to the logical conclusion of radical contingency. There is nothing universal in our experience and, since that is all we have, there is no ground for transcendental absolutes, which lie outside of experience. Nietzsche thus rejects Kant's attempt to ground the conditions of our thought in *a priori* categories. For Nietzsche, appeals to transcendence *devalue* human experience, which is the actual ground of our beliefs[29]. Sartre was to reiterate this later with the existentialist phrase, "Existence precedes Essence." The historical contingent experiences of human existence define what it is to be human.

Nietzsche's "death of God" cuts our link to transcendence, leaving existence utterly contingent. There remains only the *phenomenal* realm, open to interpretation, with nothing universally fundamental beyond historically contingent interpretation. The radical contingency of experience is all we have to go on, in our projections towards the future. We discover that the mundane world of experience is, and has been, the source of meaning all along. The real source of value and meaning is man himself. Nietzsche argues that we should own up to this state of affairs, rather than seek refuge in the transcendent as a source of meaning and values[30]. "That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from our interpretation and subjectivity is a quite idle hypothesis: it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from its relationships would still be a thing."[31] Arguing that the human subject necessarily interprets her environment in relation to historically contingent experience, Nietzsche disallows the transcendental subject he typifies in terms of the Kantian known, *a priori*, thing-in-itself[32] - and hence undermines any pretensions of theories of the subject to a-historical universality.

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[29] Fell, JP. 1979: 14.
[30] Ibid: 15.
[31] Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power*. 1967: 302-3.
[32] Fell, JP. 1979: 16-17.

Husserl wanted to appeal to the authority of universality by means of a Kantian analysis of the necessary presuppositions of thought. This tactic would allow him to posit universal necessities for thought, which would in turn apply to all who think – that is, all people. Nietzsche would no doubt have criticized him for failing to appreciate the meaning of the death of God for epistemological foundations. Husserl thus related the concerns of phenomenology – the science of appearances – back to the theme of Descartes' philosophy: the method of doubt and the *cogito*. He re-developed Descartes' method of reduction to self-evident truths, taking the *cogito* as the primary field of phenomenological truth. The only truth that can be known is subjective, but this does not lead Husserl to relativist conclusions. Husserl rejected Nietzsche's radical perspectivism to develop a universal model of consciousness on the basis of Transcendental Subjectivity.

To begin with, however, the early Husserl gave little attention to transcendental subjectivity, concentrating instead on the *phenomena* of consciousness and developing Brentano's account of intentionality, which undermines the *a priori* distinction between the self and the objective world of experience. Intentionality describes consciousness as a *relation* between the subject and object of perception. Husserl effectively gave a critique of Cartesian dualism, by means of intentionality. In immediate given-ness, writes Husserl, one finds only intentionality: "We find nothing other than consciousness of... - consciousness in the broadest sense."[33] Consciousness as intentional is "the basis of the pre-given world."

> The genuine intentional synthesis is discovered in the synthesis of several acts into one act, such that, in a unique manner of binding one meaning onto another, there emerges not merely a whole, but rather a single meaning in which these meanings themselves are contained. With the ensuing problems of correlation, lie the first beginnings of phenomenology.[34]

The above quotation, whilst directed against the dualistic Cartesian conception of the ego and world, nonetheless intimates that the problems of phenomenology lie in addressing

[33] Husserl, E. *Excerpts,* Part IIIb: "The Way into Phenomenological Transcendental Philosophy from Psychology". 1937: §8

how it is that objects of consciousness are unified through intentionality. Husserl tried to identify the intentional content of consciousness, to discover what is in the mind. Thus he developed – in *Logical Investigations* – the method of phenomenological reduction – the bracketing out of presuppositions. He asks, if all of consciousness is mere intentionality – 'consciousness of...' – how is it that various intentions relate back to one single consciousness? By reduction, intentionality's role appears constitutive. Intention relates the different perceptual experiences of a subject to the transcendent object in the act of perception[35]. Various perceptions of a thing somehow relate to one another and refer back to it in its singularity. Such considerations about the unifying role of consciousness lead Husserl back towards the dualistic model of transcendental consciousness, that which is prior to and surpasses the empirical.

In the beginning, however, Husserl retains a necessary ambiguity towards the question of the transcendent subject. In *Logical Investigations*, he writes that, "Nothing but the unity of connections between individual experiences is needed to account for the unity of conscious experience."[36] Thus, in *Logical Investigations,* Husserl holds that perception is the primary act of consciousness[37]. The object appears to consciousness, thus transcending consciousness from beyond, yet the object is also in that consciousness (being intentional). This yields the paradoxical conclusion that consciousness is outside itself[38].

This account accords with Husserl's critique of psychologism, yet in the same work he writes that transcendental philosophy begins with the Cartesian Meditations as an attempt to ground philosophy in the subjectivism of the ego. "Absolute subjectivity constitutes everything that is, in its meaning and validity... I, as transcendental ego, constitute the

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[34] ibid.
[35] Warnock, M. 1970: 28-30.
[36] Husserl, E. *Logical Investigations*. 1970: 541.
[37] Ricouer, P. 1967: 8.
[38] Ibid.

world, and at the same time I am an ego in the world."[39] It is thus that he begins the task of isolating this *a priori* constituting subjectivity.

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl began to give a bigger role to constituting consciousness. He adapted his phenomenological method, similar to Descartes' method of doubt, towards a deduction of the *a priori* conditions of constituting consciousness, not unlike Kant. From the purely formal description of consciousness as unifying intentionality, wherein Husserl abstained from any judgment beyond the mere appearance of *phenomena*, he moves towards a dualistic Transcendental Phenomenology, which involves the relating of the conditions of the appearance of things to the structure of human subjectivity, as is the case in Kant's transcendental idealism[40].

Husserl thus derived a transcendental ego as the *a priori* condition of experience, by means of a phenomenological reduction. "The Cartesian ego exists, qua transcendental ego, independently of intuition, giving unity to all acts of consciousness, grasping the reality outside by means of consciousness."[41] Thus consciousness as intentionality, unifying the subject and the object-world in a relation, is instead posited as subordinate to the activity of a transcendental ego. Husserl clearly saw no problem with an 'I' which perceives itself perceiving. This is something Sartre, however, explicitly rejects as absurd, as we shall see shortly.

To be fair to Husserl, however, Ricouer's analysis does reveal how his later work goes some way towards undoing the idealistic tendencies of *The Cartesian Meditations*, implying recognition on the part of Husserl of the problematic dualism inherent in his account of the transcendental ego. This comes from taking on an existentialist concern with *lebenswelt* – the world in which we exist, which cannot be reduced since it exists prior to all reduction. "The being of the world is manifest in such a way that all truth

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[39] Husserl, E. *Excerpts,* Part IIIb: "The Way into Phenomenological Transcendental Philosophy from Psychology". 1937: §68.
[40] Ricouer, P. 1967: 203.
[41] Husser, E. *Excerpts, Part IIIb: The Way into Phenomenological Transcendental Philosophy from Psychology.* 1937: §68.

refers back to it," writes Ricouer[42]. "The world is pre-given in the sense that every present activity surges into a world that is already there."[43] We give shape to the world before us, but it is crucially *before* us. Such is the later discovery of Husserl, preparing phenomenology for its encounter with existentialism. The idealistic tendency of transcendental phenomenology is compensated for by the discovery that one does not constitute the originary but that one can only derive from it. The *Lebenswelt* cannot be reduced since it is a necessary pre-condition of consciousness. Thus consciousness cannot be isolated from existence the way Husserl tried to do in the *Cartesian Meditations*. It is thus that Husserl rediscovers intentionality: "Consciousness defined by its intentionality is outside, beyond. It ties its wanderings to the 'things' to which it can apply its consideration, its desire, its action."[44]

Section Two: Sartre's Existentialist Critique of Husserl

Despite these later insights on the part of Husserl, Sartre inherits from Husserl an 'ontological bifurcation' – a divided being, to be solved by a Third Way – a non-dualistic ontology overcoming the subject-object divide[45]. Sartre makes use of Husserl's notion of intentionality but finds that Husserl has not overcome the dualism in being we find in Descartes, nor the idealism of Kant's transcendental ego. In *The Transcendence of the Ego*[46], Sartre argues that Husserl's transcendental ego is unnecessary for phenomenological analysis, claiming that the ego is a sedimented by-product of consciousness's engagement with the world, and not part of a constituting, *a priori* consciousness. He claims, "The ego is neither formally, nor materially in consciousness: it is outside, in the world."[47] The 'I' we encounter in consciousness does not unite our representations; rather, the unity of our representations makes the 'I' possible[48]. For Sartre, consciousness is unified by itself and its objects, rather than through a transcendental ego.

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[42] Ricouer, P. 1967: 12.
[43] Ricouer, P. 1967: 205.
[44] Ricouer, P. 1967: 204.
[45] Fell, JP. 1979: 1.
[46] Sartre, JP. *The Transcendence of the Ego*. 1990: 31.
[47] Ibid: 31.

Sartre thus reaffirms the doctrine of intentionality as an ongoing historical mediation between subject and objects. In contrast to Husserl's transcendental ego, Sartre develops an existentialist line towards phenomenology, arguing that existence precedes essence: "Man is not definable because to begin with he is nothing... he will not be anything until later... There is no human nature... man simply is... that is the first principle of existentialism..."[49] The being of man is tied to the historically contingent realm of existence, which depends on human evaluation. "Man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future, and is aware that it is doing so."[50] Sartre thus ties the phenomenological undertaking to a project of 'existentialist humanism': "the relation of transcendence as constitutive of man (in the sense of surpassing) with subjectivity (forever present in the human universe)."[51] With existential phenomenology, Sartre takes up Husserl's phenomenological method of analysis and relates it to the ontological concerns of Hegel and Heidegger, as I will now demonstrate in more detail.

Heidegger had set out phenomenological research as a philosophical science preparatory to all philosophy, arguing that our environment, arising from two distinct elements, determines our world-view. Our environment is made up firstly, "of the particular factical existence of human being in accordance with the factical possibilities of thoughtful reflection and attitude-formation, for this factical *Dasein*."[52]. Sartre expressed this as our facticity. Secondly, our environment is determined by the "*a priori,* ontological characteristics of the human *Dasein*, which also determine his world-view."[53] This Sartre expressed as our transcendence. "In the end something is given which must be given if we are to experience and understand any beings at all..."[54] Following Heidegger, Sartre is interested in the *a priori* determinations of being, whilst insisting that they are situated in our experience of the world. How is this irreconcilable distinction to lead to a "Third Way"?

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[48] Sukale, M. 1976: 12.
[49] Sartre, JP. *Existentialism and Humanism*. 1973: 12.
[50] Ibid: 19.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Heidegger, M. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. 1975: §2.
[53] Ibid.

It is here that Sartre uses the resources of dialectical thinking, having been influenced by the Hegelian scholarship of his associate Jean Hyppolite. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* [*PS*] was a major influence on many existentialist thinkers, and it is this influence that Sartre's phenomenological ontology adds to Husserl's phenomenology. According to Ricouer, "The negative announces the end of pure phenomenology... The negative is the possibility of a system no longer of the analytic type, but of the dialectical type in which the negative mediates the becoming of spirit through its forms."[55] Sartre posits the objective, constituting consciousness of Husserl as a nothing, a lack, freedom, unfulfilled desire, or, if you will, will. He thus makes an attempt to overcome dualist conclusions about consciousness and matter, positing consciousness as anti-thesis to matter in terms of nothing but nothingness, and drawing intentionality out as synthesising mind and matter.

Because of intentionality, we are aware that consciousness is nothing but being conscious of some*thing*, yet this same intentionality implies freedom – the choice of intention. Freedom is re-discovered in Being, by Sartre, through absence. Freedom is revealed as the nihilation of being as thing-ness. Through my experience of absence, I find myself at a remove from the world of cause and effect. Thus Hegel's sense of the negative re-emerges in philosophy with Sartre. I will demonstrate this in more detail in the following chapter on concrete social relations and being-for-others. At the primary level of perception, however, Sartre uses absence to link existence in the external world with free consciousness: the existential and the phenomenological. The being of man (the existential) consists in existing and negating being (consciousness). Thus, in Sartrean existential phenomenology, the *a priori* conditions of consciousness are posited as necessarily bound up in the world. As Ricouer puts it, "Husserl's concept of intentionality takes on a new look after this bath in negativity."[56] Sartre's existential phenomenology makes the transition between transcendental phenomenology, born of the reduction of everything to its appearing to me, and ontology, which restores the question

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[54] ibid.
[55] Ricouer. 1967: 206.

of the sense of *being*, for that which is said to 'exist'. Sartre took the step of identifying negation as our contribution to our existence.

The question to be looked at next is whether Sartre succeeds in overcoming the problems he identified in Husserl's work. These problems are the same as those identified in the previous section by Foucault, namely that Sartre's transcendental subjectivity incorporates an *a priori* consciousness, at a remove from its external environment. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre makes some references that give credence to Foucault's interpretation. He begins his discussion of subjectivity by claiming, "At the point of departure, there cannot be any other truth than this, *I think, therefore I am,* which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself."[57] Does Sartre then have some notion of an *a priori* dimension to consciousness? Sartre claims that "there exist human conditions which define our fundamental situation"[58] yet he argues that these conditions are neither objective, nor subjective. Thus there is a universal human of condition for Sartre, although this condition is nothing if we do not live it.

An Hegelian interpretation of Sartrean intentionality, I believe, helps to explain how Sartre takes account of the fundamental ambiguity of freedom in situation. In the final section of this chapter I will argue that Sartre's conceptions of freedom and transcendental subjectivity avoid the dualistic model of the self and world to which Foucault accused him of succumbing. Sartre's use of an Hegelian, dialectical model of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness* overcomes the antithetical dualism found in Husserl by means of a synthesis of these apparently irreconcilable realms. By making intentionality the locus of this synthesis, Sartre proves that "there is no sense in life *a priori* – life is nothing until it is lived."[59] In terms of intentionality, consciousness is consciousness of... My projects are necessarily bound up in the outside world.

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[56] Ibid: 211.
[57] Sartre, JP. *Existentialism and Humanism*. 1973: 15.
[58] Ibid.
[59] ibid.

PART III: CONSIDERING FOUCAULT'S OBJECTIONS

We have seen that structuralism and existential phenomenology regard human experience from opposite positions. Whilst existential phenomenology takes its lead from Kant's investigation of the conditions of experience immanent *in* experience, structuralism presupposes nothing about the subject of experience. For structuralists, the unifying element of experience comes from our underlying discourse, which is independent of individual subjective intentions. Foucault's call for the "death of man" is explicitly anti-humanist. It is a rejection of the subject-centred discourse of existential phenomenology. What specifically, then, is the problem with Sartre's model of consciousness in light of these structuralist concerns?

In Part I, we saw how Foucault's discourse-centred account of the determinations of human experience seems to be radically at odds with Sartre's consciousness-centred model of radical human freedom. Foucault rejects the idea of essential human nature, arguing that subjectivity and freedom are structured through history out of relations of power and knowledge. For Foucault, Sartre has failed to account for the fact that we are utterly contingent beings: who we are, is contingent upon the determinations of our experience of the world. Ironically, it was Sartre who captured the idea best, with the phrase, "Existence precedes essence."[60]

However, Foucault criticizes Sartre's conception of transcendent subjectivity for according consciousness a determining role as the unified centre of meaning, freely constituting the world around itself. For Foucault, freedom is historically contingent upon discourse, the conditions of power/knowledge – there is no subject outside of discourse. This is argued to contradict Sartre's transcendent model of consciousness as radically free. I will start with this objection, showing that Sartre's conception of freedom is not as radically at odds with Foucault's approach as may first seem to be the case. In examining Sartre's distinction between the transcendental and the transcendent, I will argue that Sartre's 'pre-discursive' self is minimal enough to be consistent with Foucault's model of

[60] Sartre, JP. *Existentialism and Humanism*, 1973: 3.

subjectivity in discourse. By addressing Foucault's objections, I will show that Sartre overcame the subject-object dualism in phenomenology he had inherited from Husserl, effectively historicizing everything about subjectivity except for our transcendent agency.

Foucault's objections to Sartre's model of consciousness can be summarized in three relatively distinct issues questions concerning the status of subjectivity. Foucault questions (a) the freedom of the subject, (b) the notion of a transcendental subject, and (c) the persistence of a Cartesian subject-object dualism he sees to be pervading Sartre's ontology. From these inter-related issues, I hope to derive the argument that Foucault's attack on Sartre's 'a-historicism' is philosophically unjustified, given Sartre's interpretation of intentionality.

A) Consciousness is Freedom – Intentionality and the Argument for Freedom

Sartre believes we are essentially free. Such is the constituting consciousness of Sartre. While existence – our environment - may precede essence – who we are - we remain singular beings who are nonetheless different from our environment. By contrast, Foucault argues that we are entirely defined by our historically contingent existence, our context. In contradiction to Sartre's claim that we are necessarily free, prior to the contingent determinations of existence, Foucault believes that freedom itself is conditioned. We are not free to determine meaning, for instance. Rather, there are meanings we cannot but accept, given to us by discourse. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault shows how autonomy is constructed by society to provide a normalizing image of man, to lend the determination of our subjectivity legitimacy, inducing self-policing regularity in our behaviour, thereby making us complicit in our own subjugation. The question to be asked is: what does our freedom consist of for Sartre? To what extent does he posit freedom as exterior to historical permutation? To answer this will involve analysing Sartre's argument for freedom, through an investigation of his phenomenological ontology. I will argue that freedom, for Sartre, is always historically situated through intentionality.

Similar to Foucault, Sartre is concerned with a world where historical contingency goes all the way down to being[61], even to existence itself. Everything that we are is affected by our historically contingent context. Yet he also argues that we are necessarily free. We call into question. Everything we do could have been otherwise, were it not for our conscious intentions[62]. I am my desire, my freedom. Against a transcendent background of being-in-itself, consciousness is for-itself. Sartre's existential phenomenology addresses the problem of Cartesian dualism through an Hegelian *aufhebung*: the dialectical synthesis of body and mind, self and world, being-for-itself and being-in-itself through intentionality, putting the subject in history. Interestingly, Hegel himself posits intentionality in perception as *aufhebung*[63] in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I will be giving an Hegelian reading of Sartre's ontology to explore its dialectical nature, and thereby overcome criticisms against Sartre, which abstract from the deliberate ambiguity in his conception of intentionality, which historicizes the phenomenology of the subject.

Intentionality, for Sartre, can be explained by noting that we intend in two senses of the word: we intend towards (an object) and intend (to do so). Consciousness is the intending act itself. There is no substance to this intention other than that which is intended. My intention and that which I intend towards are thus brought together in the act of consciousness. It is thus that I am always already in the world; a world of my making which nonetheless transcends me. Freedom of intention is the basis of Sartre's ontology. It is our freedom that separates us from being-in-itself, the object of intentionality, that makes us for-ourselves, that breaks the chain of causality in the world outside us. Our freedom is necessarily prior to the exterior world, yet it is only takes effect in the world. With the dialectical concept of intentionality, Sartre claims that we *are* our intentions. All consciousness is consciousness *of* an object,[64] involving a bringing together of the subject and her world. Thus Sartre derives an historicist ontology of the subject.

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[61] Martin, B. 2000: 10.
[62] Flynn, T. 1979: 160.
[63] The importance of this will become increasingly clear as this thesis progresses, given Sartre's rejection of dialectical *aufhebung*, as well as the post-structuralist attack on its teleological implications
[64] Morris, P. 1985: 181.

This synthesis of mind and body, self and world – through desire and its object – conforms to Hegelian dialectical ontology. For Sartre, 'man's essence is his liberty'[65]. Primary consciousness, the pre-reflective 'Cartesian' ego is, essentially, *not* the object it intends towards, which is being-in-itself. This negation, however, involves the possibility of non-being[66]. The non-being of consciousness then, is the very source of its liberty. In breaking the chain of causality by the negating act of intention, intending this and that, consciousness *is* liberty. The argument is as follows:

Firstly, every determination of consciousness is necessarily a negation of everything that is not its object, as explained by *gestalt* theory's figure-ground analysis of perception – negation in perception involves focusing on *something*[67]. Consciousness thus involves negation. Secondly, consciousness must know it is not that of which it is conscious. Consciousness is the source of the negation. Thirdly, we cannot make sense of our experience of absence in the world without reference to the role of consciousness in our experience. Negation cannot come from being-in-itself, since we do not perceive non-being as the *transcendent object* of our intention. Thus negation must come from us. It is mind-dependent, as Locke put it in a similar context. Consciousness derives its power to negate from nowhere outside itself[68]. It is thus that Sartre can claim, "There is no difference between the being of man and his being free."[69] Freedom comes from non-being because non-being escapes causality.

It can be seen that Sartre's ontology of consciousness is based on the freely chosen activity of negation. We exist as an irruption in the chain of being – in the determinations of cause and effect. Our intentions are determined by nothing but ourselves. We are free *a priori*. In terms of Foucauldian archaeology, our freedom is 'pre-discursive' – it takes effect prior to discourse. And yet our freedom, our will, intends towards its *object*. The object of consciousness is crucial in this ontology of freedom. While we may be free in our intentions, what we intend towards is already there before us. It is before us and prior

[65] Howells, C. 1988: 1.
[66] Salvan, J. 1962: xxxiv.
[67] Martin, T. 2002: 49-51.
[68] Howells, C. 1988: 15.

to us, 'transcending' us in a sense I will explain in more detail shortly. The object of our attention exists before us, and will persist despite our attention towards it. Being-in-itself does not depend on us for its being. We are superfluous to that towards which we intend. Our independence, one might argue, is dialectically related to its dependence on what is already given.

Thus, for Sartre, freedom is necessarily situated in its historically contingent situation. Whilst we fundamentally negate, it is that which is exterior to us that, in our freedom, we negate. Contrary to Foucault's objection that Sartre's ontology of the subject is a-historical, we find his dialectical concept of intentionality necessarily links consciousness to the contingent empirical domain. Consciousness has to assume the contingency of being-in-itself, since it has no foundation of its own. Such is our *situation*, our 'facticity' – the background against which we are free. "There is something like a primacy of the in-itself over the for-itself."[70] Yet against the background of the situation in which we find our freedom, what do we consist of? We have seen Sartre speak of absences, present in the world of experience. What, then, is the role of consciousness in constituting the world of experience? This question brings us to the second objection we will discuss: Foucault's criticism of transcendental subjectivity in Sartre's humanistic ontology.

B) Sartre's Subject – Transcendental Ego, Transcendent Consciousness

Foucault's second objection to Sartre is that his ontology takes recourse to a transcendental subjectivity. This is in fact the same objection Sartre had raised against Husserl. Sartre, too, is criticized for making the subject the source of all meaning for the individual, arguing that consciousness determines what is perceived, through negation, at a radical remove from determination. Foucault, on the other hand, argued that discourse is the primary source of meaning. Subjectivity is constituted by discourse according to disciplinary techniques and modes of subjectification. For Foucault, the self is given to

[69] Sartre, J. quoted in Salvan, 1962: 16.
[70] Ibid.

us, and Sartre is said to have overlooked this by postulating a pre-discursive meaning-giving subject.

There is no ego in immediate consciousness for Sartre though. I cannot simultaneously reflect on myself reflecting while I am reflecting[71]. I cannot be both the subject and object of my experience, simultaneously, as Sartre points out in his critique of Husserl. In the act of intention, we are necessarily aware of that which we intend towards, but this implies that we are also not that towards which we intend. It is important to see here that there is no substance in this consciousness of myself to myself other than that I am not the object of my consciousness, which must be presupposed in the act of intention. The paradox here is that I nevertheless *am* consciousness, qua intention towards an object. Consciousness relies on a distance (Heidegger's 'clearing') between it and itself[72]. It is unable to intend towards an object without engaging in the self-conscious act of negation of the world, and thus, paradoxically, the substance of consciousness is necessarily of the world. In contrast to Descartes and Husserl's methods of reduction, Sartre argues, "It is not in some hiding place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd."[73]

From this understanding of consciousness, we see that consciousness must be aware of itself. There must be a self that is conscious. Thus, despite consciousness being intentionality towards an object, we derive Foucault's objection that Sartre has smuggled a pre-discursive interiority into his model of consciousness. It seems he has posited a fundamental, universal subjectivity, which is *a priori* aware of itself qua consciousness. I will explain why this is not the case by looking at the distinction between positional and non-positional, pre-reflective and reflective, consciousness, as well as the Sartrean distinction between the transcendent and the transcendental. The minimal self, presupposed in the activity of consciousness, I will argue, is far from transcendental; entirely insubstantial, in fact, if abstracted from its 'exteriority'.

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[71] Salvan, J. 1962: 26. This would imply an infinite regression. Logically, I can only reflect on myself in the past tense

[72] Martin, T. 2002: 6.

[73] Sartre, JP. *Existentialism and Humanism*. 1973: 5.

Phyllis Morris gives an excellent account of Sartre's distinction between consciousness and the self. Pre-reflective consciousness – all intention – as I have shown, involves both positional consciousness of the object, as well as non-positional consciousness of itself not-being the object of which it is conscious[74]. This, crucially, is *not* the ego, but simply an awareness of one's necessary distance from the object of perception. There is, however, a secondary type of consciousness, which is reflective. This comes about when consciousness takes itself as the object of its own reflection. Owing to the impossibility of being both subject and object of one's consciousness simultaneously, the self, encountered by consciousness, is necessarily at a remove from consciousness. Man's essence is always historical, "always what has-been"[75] In the present, we always already transcend the historically conditioned self, which we perceive, which in turn transcends us. Contrary to Foucault, the transcendent ego, for Sartre, is an historical product of consciousness, and thus cannot be consciousness itself since consciousness involves a necessary lack, a non-being. Consciousness "is not what it is"[76].

The distance between consciousness and itself is best explained by looking at the differences between Sartre's use of the terms transcendence and transcendental. The "transcendental" is the necessary condition of all experience – i.e. constituting consciousness. This does not entail a transcendent ego, an ego which transcends historical contingency, but rather the intrinsic capacity of consciousness to go beyond what is given[77], that is – to transcend its situation as seen in our discussion of freedom. The transcendent, on the other hand, refers to that which is given. Since consciousness has no content, the objects of consciousness transcend it – they don't disappear when we turn our attention away from them[78]. To complicate matters, the ego is transcendent in this sense. The ego does not reflect – is not conscious - but rather is the history of one's conscious activity, posited on reflection, by reflecting consciousness. The transcendent ego amounts to character, personality, essence – the product of conscious intention; it is

[74] Morris, P. 1985: 181.
[75] Salvan, J. 1962: 20.
[76] Ibid: 25.
[77] Morris, P. 1985: 182.

an historical object that transcends transcendental consciousness. The subject is thus both in-itself and for-itself.

Foucault criticised Sartre for providing an account of transcendental subjectivity. Yet we see in the above account that in intention, Sartre's transcendental consciousness has no other content than non-positional awareness of itself and the object of its intention. The transcendent ego, on the other hand, is the product of determination, of transcendental consciousness and its situation. Sartre's subject is, then, in history, despite what Foucault argued, and is compatible in this light with Foucault's own idea of subjectivity. Consciousness, although prior to the determinations of history, is nothing but what it intends, and the awareness that it is not that. Sartre does not describe a *transcendental* consciousness that constitutes the world[79]. There is transcendental consciousness, but you can't say much about it, other than that it negates of its own accord. On the other hand, the *transcendent* ego that is encountered on reflection is an historical object, rather than a subject. The reflecting consciousness is itself always un-reflected. Consciousness is neither ego, nor substance. The subject, reflecting, is never encountered; it encounters. We see that Foucault's objection abstracts unfairly from the ongoing, historical synthesis of intentionality.

C) Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself: Dualism, or Ambiguity?

For Foucault, Sartre's existential phenomenology is marked by the same Cartesian subject-object dualism that Sartre had tried to overcome in addressing Husserl. Being-for-itself remains radically distinct from being-in-itself, transcendence from facticity. For Foucault, the subject and object cannot be regarded as radically distinct from each other. Each term is irreducible to any essential abstraction from its Siamese twin. The subject is composed of the world it takes as its object, and this world is composed of human terms that shape it, such as through discourse. While, for Sartre, the subject and object are separately identifiable terms, Foucault rejects this distinction. Foucault collapses the

[78] Ibid: 183.
[79] Consciousness, for Sartre, is shaped by the world, yet from its position of freedom

distinction between subject and object, denying that either is free from the historical determinations of discourse. There is no exterior-interior to the subject, for Foucault. What for Sartre is a unifying subject, for Foucault serves merely as a vehicle for discourse, with nothing in and of itself.

Sartre, on the other hand, is said to perpetuate the Cartesian dualism he was attempting to rid philosophy of. While maintaining, contra Husserl, that the ego is an imaginary construct[80], Sartre attempted to continue the phenomenological method of bracketing off the contingently personal, determining the essence of the structures of consciousness, and identifying being-for-itself at a radical remove from being-in-itself. I argue, however, that our fundamental intentionality overcomes the radical separation of subject and object, transcendence and historical context. My dialectical analysis of being-in-itself and being-for-itself will demonstrate that the two are co-constitutive. Sartre can have freedom and yet still maintain that man is in the world, immersed in history. The necessary ambiguity of the structure of consciousness accommodates Foucault despite his objections.

Being-in-itself – that is our facticity. Being-in-itself can be taken as the thesis in Sartre's dialectical model of intentionality. Being-in-itself is that which we intend towards. For consciousness to be 'consciousness of...', it must be conscious of something which transcends it. Consciousness is not a thing, but it is always conscious of things. Consciousness involves facing "a full and concrete presence which is *not* consciousness."[81] Thus being-in-itself is that to which consciousness clings from its nothingness. It is the 'content' of consciousness, the stuff of the world around me. Being-in-itself is substance, whereas being-for-itself is nothingness. Being-for-itself is my transcendence. It can be taken as the anti-thesis in the model of consciousness as intentionality. Being-for-itself is the intention of intentionality, the intention to posit the object of consciousness – being-in-itself. The poles of the structure of consciousness are thus irreducible – the one being material, the other immaterial.

[80] Howells, C. 1988: 2 or find the original in transcendence of ego
[81] Salvan, J. 1962: 6.

However, as I argued in my discussion of his phenomenological and existentialist background, Sartre posits a necessary ambiguity between being-for-itself and being-in-itself. He thus overcomes the anti-thetical dualism, which plagued Husserl, by positing mind as negation and referring it to matter through the mediating role of intentionality. Sartre thus achieves a Third Way between the two, which overcomes the Cartesian dualism, which his model of consciousness addressed. Whilst Sartre was critical of Hegel's conception of synthesis[82], as I will show in more detail in the following chapter, I believe this resulted from his misunderstanding the notion of synthesis as an *overcoming* of difference, rather than an ongoing *becoming* through the interplay of difference. The terms of synthesis do not cancel each other out. This interpretation of dialectical synthesis involves uniting being-for-itself and being-in-itself, such as we in fact find in Sartre's conception of intentionality. The trace of thesis and anti-thesis always remain in synthesis for Hegel. Similarly, in the synthesis of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, the irreconcilable is reconciled; the antinomy, undone, remains, yet no longer in abstract, isolated terms. It is through the relational activity of consciousness – intentionality – that my necessary, transcendent freedom is brought into context in the historically contingent material world, and that the world is brought to me.

Sartre's subject is thus free and essentially distinct from the world in which it acts. In some sense, there is a given-ness of desire, of freedom, to human nature, which we cannot escape, and which escapes – or rather, transcends – the determinations of environment. It seemed that Sartre succumbed to precisely the sort of dualism to which he objected in the work of Husserl. However, an analysis of his ontology reveals the very structure of the subject to be dialectically bound up in both transcendence and facticity. Sartre's transcendental subject is absolutely minimal. What is given, prior to our experience of the world around us, is that we are free. However, this freedom is meaningless without a world in which it can be exercised, without an object of desire. There is no substance to our freedom apart from the choices we make in relation to our

[82] For example, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre speaks of the synthesis of race as defined by racists, and race as celebrated by those racialised (an anti-thesis to the racist thesis), as if this would entail mutual annulment in a race-free society (hence seeing synthesis as an *overcoming* of opposition rather than the ongoing, mutual co-constitution of the terms in *becoming* (Sartre, J. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. 1948: 37).

factual situation. Sartre's minimal self escapes the charge of dualism made against it by Foucault. We can maintain Foucault's line on the historical construction of the subject without having to reject Sartre's account of freedom. In fact, in the following chapter on relations with others, I will show that Foucault's account of power relations can be defended against objections to its apparent determinism in terms of Sartre's conception of freedom. Sartre's ontology and Foucault's pre-suppositions will be seen to coincide.

CHAPTER TWO: RELATIONS OF POWER

The previous chapter introduced the concept of dialectical intentionality (which shows how subjectivity is constituted in intentional relations with one's environment, at a fundamental ontological level) that I use in this thesis to motivate an argument for historicism in political philosophy. It also revealed a problem with Foucault's structuralist methodology, shown up in the debate between Foucault and Sartre. In this chapter I will show how Foucault overcomes the a-historical 'discourse-determinism' of Archaeology to develop an account of historically contingent, inter-subjective power relations in his later work. Having given an historicist ontology of the subject's intentional relations with her world in the previous chapter, this chapter will present an historicist ontology of social relations, i.e. power. I return to my analysis of the relations between the work of Sartre and Foucault to explain how freedom is constituted in relations of power.

I clarify Foucault's conception of freedom by appealing to Sartre's account of radical freedom in the transcendent subject's relations with others, given a dialectical interpretation. I will argue for a particular interpretation of Hegelian synthesis (as ongoing), in order to suggest a way around the impasse of social conflict inevitably generated by transcendent subjectivity in Sartrean ontology by means of an historicist account. This dialectical reading will serve to defuse objections to the coherence of Foucault's conception of freedom being necessarily implicated in relations of power. Dialectical analysis of being-for-itself and being-for-others gives rise to an immanent critique of logical identity that uses temporality to explain how the freedom of Foucault's subject of resistance is maintained in the face of the omnipresence of power. The chapter concludes with the establishment of an historicist ontology of power, which I will use in the final chapter to defend Foucault's epistemology, in which knowledge is said to be historically generated in relations of power.

Section 1: Foucault on Power

To recap, the last chapter amounted to a defence of the Sartrean subject against Foucault's complaint of a-historical transcendence, of a universal subject that transcends the historical contingency of existence. Conversely, Sartre attacked the a-historical treatment of structure in Foucault's archaeological work, arguing, in sympathy with Ricouer, that Foucault's structuralism neglects to theorize the speaking subject of discourse. In this chapter, I will the two theorists together, to show how Foucault addressed these Sartrean concerns, shifting away from the discourse-centred approach of Archaeology, by theorising subjectivity in terms of productive power. *Discipline and Punish* shows how individuals are strategically 'subjectified' according to disciplinary norms. This shows how, ontologically, the subject is inextricably bound up in historically contingent relations of power.

I begin with Foucault's account of power and resistance to explain the theorisation of productive, rather than purely repressive, power in Foucault's later work. Foucault argues that the starting point of any analysis of power relations is the identification of points of resistance. Power can only be described in terms of ongoing relational strategies, not from the point of view of discrete agents repressively directing power against the pre-existing freedom of other agents. This brings me to the objection by Slavoj Zizek that Foucault's respective conceptions of resistance as a product of power and the freedom of the subject of resistance are irreconcilable[83]. This is similar to Taylor's objection that resistance, or liberation, is incoherent if the subject is always already in relations of power. This section thereby introduces the problem the chapter is intended to solve. By demonstrating that Foucault's account of the subject of resistance is compatible with his account of subjectivation, I will establish an historicist ontology of politically constituted inter-subjectivity

[83] Zizek, S. 1999: 255.

Sartre's objection in the previous chapter revealed Foucault's mistake in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*[84], to treat discourse a-historically, as independent of the constituting activity of subject, in his attempt to avoid recourse to meaning-giving, autonomous subjectivity. "Archaeology's aim," he argued, "was to free history from the grip of phenomenology,"[85] Suspicious of the notion of the centred subject as a source of intelligibility in philosophy, Foucault looked instead at how discourse constitutes subjectivity. His anti-humanist manifesto is summed up at the end of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*: "You may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said, but don't imagine that, with all you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he."[86] This echoes Nietzsche's declaration 100 years earlier that atheism entailed the loss of universal philosophical foundations, exposing theory to the contingency of historical flux. The subject, argued Foucault, is no substitute for the universal intelligibility once granted by God.

However, in *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault admits, "I confused the effects of power on statements (the discursive regime) too much with systematicity,"[87] informed by an opposition between the content of historical events and the independent structure of form-giving discourse. Moving on from structuralism, he argued, "One's point of reference should not be the great model of language and signs, but... war and battle."[88] Meaning is not stable or systematic, but rather, is derived from ongoing historical contestation. To clarify, in an interview in *Foucault Live*[89] he argues that his previous conception of power was too close to a simplistic, uni-directional concept of power as an essentially negative legal instrument of repression. He reveals in *Discipline and Punish*, that power is also productive, not purely negative, viewing power as a relation of forces: "All relations of force imply a power relationship."[90] Power is no longer conceived of in terms

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[84] As Dreyfuss & Rabinow demonstrate, and Foucault himself admits, in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*.
[85] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2003: 224.
[86] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* 2003: 232.
[87] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*, 1980: 113.
[88] ibid. Foucault's frequent use of this metaphor emphasizes the oppositional antagonism of power relations
[89] Foucault, M. *Foucault Live*, 1989: 207.
[90] Foucault, M. *Foucault Live*, 1989: 211.

of sovereign power, but productive power. *Discipline and Punish* demonstrates how subjects are constituted through 'a multiplicity of forces'[91].

Foucault's account of power is not one in which a 'sovereign, central spirit', such as the state, holds power which it wields over others. Productive power takes its shape from a "a myriad of bodies constituted as subjects through power."[92] Productive power incites us to choose certain norms, harnessing the will, rather than preventing us from transgressing norms by denying the will. Productive power does not repress, but rather directs, human freedom. Power is not about one person or group's consolidated domination; it is something continually circulating. Power is employed through a net-like organization, with individuals both undergoing and exercising it. "Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application."[93] They are both the effect of productive power and the elements of its articulation, not merely the elements who exercise power or over whom power is exercised.

This *relational* aspect of power is important to keep in mind when we try to reconcile the subject of power with the subject of resistance shortly. Foucault states that, "Relations of power are strategic relations. Every time one side does something, the other one responds by deploying a conduct, a behaviour that counter-invests it, tries to escape it, diverts it, turns it back against itself, etc. Thus nothing is ever stable in these relations of power."[94] Again: "Each offensive on one side serves as leverage for a counter-offensive from the other."[95] These struggles go on indefinitely[96]. Modes of actions allow for possibilities of resistance and counter-attack on either side. Foucault takes the Nietzschean view that power is not fundamentally repressive, but rather a *relationship*, involving 'a hostile engagement of forces'[97]. Power exists only in action, a relation of forces. It is not, as conceived by the liberal tradition in political philosophy, "a concrete thing which

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[91] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*, 1980: 97.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid: 98.
[94] Foucault, M. *Foucault Live, 1989*: 143.
[95] Foucault, M. *Power Knowledge*, 1980: 163.
[96] This is why Foucault believes he is working in an anti-Hegelian framework (*Power/Knowledge*: 56), betraying a teleological conception of the dialectic foreign to the interpretation I have given
[97] Foucault, M. *Power Knowledge*, 1980: 90.

everyone has, whose partial or total cession enables the establishment of political power"[98]. It is struggle.

The following quote from *The Will to Knowledge*[99] stresses this relational characteristic of power:

> Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power... The strictly relational character of power relationships... depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance... These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network... Resistances... are the odd term in relations of power, they are inscribed in power as an irreducible opposite.

Foucault wanted to resolve the problems of the constitution of subjectivity within an historical framework, rather than the universal transcendental framework of phenomenology. He dispensed with the constituting subject to see how the subject is historically constituted[100]. Repressive power[101] is expensive and fragile, producing too much resistance. Productive power is exercised more subtly through such techniques as surveillance. Surveillance involves little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints; only a gaze, "an inspecting gaze which each individual under his own weight will end by interiorising to the point where he is his own overseer, each individual exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself."[102] This is the exercise of power from within, rather than from above the social body. Modern techniques of power are more productive, more individualized, more efficient than forced tolerance.[103] Individuals are always historically embedded in power relations:

> Subjects do not first pre-exist and later enter into combat or harmony; subjects emerge on a field of battle and play their roles, there and there alone.[104]

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[98] Ibid: 88.
[99] I.e. *History of Sexuality Vo.l I*, 1978: 96-97.
[100] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*, 1980: 117.
[101] What one might call "Power by force" although this would be to confuse the broader Nietzschean/ Foucauldian conception of 'force' as a basic element of will, as opposed to forced tolerance
[102] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*, 1980: 155.
[103] Ibid: 119.
[104] Dreyfuss & Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 1982: 109.

Section 2: The Absent Subject? A Humanist Stand-in

To introduce the objection to Foucault's conception of freedom, the above remarks on power and resistance appear, at first glance, to be inconsistent. From Foucault we get an idea of the individual as saturated with power relations. Subjectivity is constituted within a field of power relations to the extent that no part of the subject is left unaffected. Modern techniques of subjectification create individuals so thoroughly imbued with power relations that they 'voluntarily submit[105]' to productive norms of behaviour required of them by a generalized non-subjective intentionality at work in the power matrix. While Foucault insists on a co-constitutive relation between force and resistance, Zizek objects[106] that Foucault's rejection of transcendent freedom renders the notion of resistance incoherent. Where is the space for freedom to resist if the subject is thoroughly implicated in relations of power? Where disciplinary norms constitute the subject, resistance becomes hard to explain.

Taylor's critique of Foucault's conception of power, points to a similar problem. He accuses Foucault of incoherence on the subject of resistance[107]. Taylor argues that Foucault's critique of disciplinary technologies links power to liberation and freedom, but there is no ground for either liberation or critique if we are always already subjected to power relations. Taylor questions the coherence of Foucault's assertion that, "Power is exercised over free individuals, insofar as they are free... Freedom is the condition for the exercise of power"[108], given the ubiquity of power relations and inextricable relations between power and the constitution of subjectivity.

What characteristics are required of the sort of subject of resistance that would satisfy the requirements Zizek and Taylor demand of Foucault? The problem goes deeper than elucidating a subject who might resist the myriad forces of power effected against it, in Foucault's accounts of psychiatric and disciplinary practices for example. In fact, one

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[105] 'voluntary' is ironic given the lack of agency implied by such submission
[106] Zizek, S. 1999: 260.
[107] Taylor, C. in Wisnewski, J. 2000: 420.
[108] Foucault, M. "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfuss & Rabinow: 221.

might argue that by Foucault's account, there is in effect no agent to speak of. If each individual is constructed in relation to the social and political forces around her, where is there room for the interiority of a subject of resistance?

I venture to suggest that two humanist sympathies affect one's reading of Foucault. Despite his rejection of humanism, they colour one's approach to his writing in a manner one suspects not unintended. Firstly, the situations he describes offend our sense of autonomy. We do not like to feel that the decisions we think we make are the net effect of an insidious matrix of power. Furthermore, we tend to imaginatively infer a, perhaps suppressed, autonomy on the part of the individuals affected by such power mechanisms. Yet if we take Zizek and Taylor's objections seriously, and Foucault himself for that matter, his account of subjectivity gives no ground for such imagined autonomy. What is lost in the process of subjectification if freedom is a construct? Foucault, it would seem, is not entitled to the outrage he affects with his discourse. Such outrage appeals to the very autonomy one expects from the sort of humanist account of subjectivity he rejects.

For the purposes of this chapter I will assume that Sartre's humanist account of a radically free subject will suffice to meet the requirements Zizek and Taylor find lacking in Foucault. Sartre's humanist account of subjectivity posits being-in-itself as radically exterior to being-for-itself. He presents us with a classic humanist subject whose ontological freedom is the very basis of its means to resist external forces. Sartre's subject embodies humanist characteristics, in that its freedom transcends the historical contingency of power relations, as a pre-condition for power relations. Desire's positing of absence, in intention, is the basis of the for-itself's radical alterity from that which is in-itself, a break in causality. Our freedom to choose, for Sartre, is the foundational platform for the constitution of the subject. In contrast to the saturated nodal point of power relations constituting Foucault's subject of resistance, as objected to by Zizek and Taylor, Sartre's subject is precisely *not* that to which it exists in relation. The autonomy entailed by such alterity is the basis of human freedom to which Sartre appeals in his calls for resistance against oppression, yet he takes into account the historicism that Foucault is anxious to maintain. It is the transcendence required of a humanist account of the subject,

which must be emphasized if freedom of resistance is to be secured, yet this need not override the historical contingency of subjectivity Foucault wants to emphasise.

In the following section I wish to examine Sartre's account of subject in relation to others in *Being & Nothingness* to draw out the implications of radically transcendent individual freedom existing in the context of social relations. Sartre's account of the subject embodies the freedom against which power can be seen as an imposition. I use a dialectical critique of logical identity to help reconcile Sartre's humanist account of subjectivity with Foucault's account of resistance. This will enable me to defend Foucault against the sort of objections made by Zizek and Taylor as well as demonstrate how Foucault's theorisation of productive power takes into account complaints against the a-historical treatment of discourse evident in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, discussed in the previous chapter.

Section 3: On Concrete Relations with Others

Let us examine Sartre's account of being-for-others and concrete modes of relations with others in the third part of *Being & Nothingness.* To reiterate the argument for freedom in the previous chapter, Sartre believes in the radical transcendence of self-consciousness in terms of its non-being. Consciousness, for Sartre, is the irruption of non-being in the world. This primary feature of consciousness is the ground of its freedom, since consciousness is essentially that which breaks the causal chain of given-being. Consciousness is precisely the moment of non-determination, the questioning of the object of perception for example. We are free because we lack being. We are always engaged in the ongoing historical process of becoming. Consciousness is what it is not, and is not what it is.[109] For Sartre, our interiority can never be reconciled with exteriority in an inclusive synthesis[110]. Yet while being-for-itself is distinct from being-in-itself, this distinction is threatened by the intrusion of the other.

[109] *Being & Nothingness* [hereafter B&N], 1956: 617
[110] Butler, J. 1987: 121.

Being-for-others is the mode of being of the for-itself existing as an object for another consciousness. The for-itself, in the encounter with the other, sees the other as a subjectivity, which she is not, a subjectivity that objectifies her. This objectification by the other, in the original relation with the other of being-seen, is best explained in Sartre's example of the voyeur:[111] We imagine a man standing alone on a landing, looking through a keyhole. In this moment, the man's focus is directed outward. He is enthralled by the object of his gaze, lost in the scene, unaware of himself, engaged on an unreflective level of consciousness as pure being-for-itself. However, the situation changes abruptly when the voyeur hears footsteps in the hall. Suddenly, he feels shame, aware of himself as the other sees him – alone, looking through the keyhole. It is in this moment of being-seen, through the gaze of the other, that one becomes aware of oneself as an object amongst others, centred on a for-itself that is not oneself. Under the gaze of the other, I am no longer the referential centre of my world. The other is perceived as a subject for whom I am an object. This affects my reflective consciousness by making me aware of myself as an object amongst others. "I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but that I have my foundation outside of myself."[112] Let us examine the implications this has for self-consciousness – being-for-itself's consciousness of itself.

At this stage of Sartre's account of being-for-others a question arises which has crucial bearing on the self-other relation. Describing the de-centring of subjectivity under the gaze of the other, Sartre writes, "I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential *modification* appears in my structure."[113] What does this modification entail for the structure of the for-itself? The question is whether a) relations with others play a role in the constitution of subjectivity, or whether b) these are relations in which pre-constituted subjects engage. Sartre's theory of transcendent consciousness *seems* to rule out the former option, as it might undermine transcendence. The meaning of the 'hostility' implied in the gaze of the other is that it strips me of my transcendence, thus threatening

[111] Sartre, JP. *B&N*, 1956: 259-260.
[112] Ibid: 75.
[113] Ibid: 260 [my emphasis]

my subjectivity and limiting my freedom[114]. Yet Sartre maintains an ontological priority of the for-itself in the relation with the other. The subjectivity of the other eludes me, "it is separated from me by a nothingness I cannot fill"[115] To recall the concept of intentionality considered in the first chapter, wherein being-for-itself is the nothingness, the desire, the intention behind the positing of an object of consciousness, which it is not[116]. Intention brings together being-for-itself and being-in-itself, the subject and her environment. The other cannot see as I do, but, conversely, nor can I see myself as the other sees me. Thus my freedom is contextualized by her recognition of me. Hence the radical alterity of being-for-itself is situated in the context of social relations.

Sartre insists on the transcendence of being-for-itself, in the context of relations with others. "If in general there is an other, it is necessary above all that I be the one who is not the other, and it is in this very negation effected by me upon myself that I make myself be and that the other arises as the other."[117] Being-for-itself is the primary ontological structure of self-consciousness - and, "it would perhaps not be impossible to conceive of a for-itself which would be wholly free from others."[118] At what level then does the other 'strip me of my transcendence'? How does the other's gaze threaten my subjectivity? In order to grasp the ambiguity of the meaning of this 'modification' that 'appears in my structure' under the gaze of the other, it is the secondary mode of consciousness we need to look at, namely reflective consciousness. This is the transcendent, historically generated self, reflected on by in conscious intentionality, whereby one perceives oneself, qua being-in-itself.

If the other changes my mode of being from being-for-itself to being-for-another, alienating me from the transcendent freedom that I am, and yet I am ontologically free, then it must be in the nature of my self-as-object that the 'modification' appears. Reflective consciousness is consciousness, conscious of itself. The object of this mode of reflection is the transcendent self, which the illustration of the voyeur reveals to be

[114] Martin, T. 2002: 97-8.
[115] Sartre, JP. *B&N*. 1956: 261.
[116] i.e. non-reflective consciousness
[117] Ibid: 283.

subject to the scrutiny of others. So it is not at the level of unreflective intentional enthralment with the object of consciousness, but rather the level of self-consciousness, that one is affected by the regard of others. The self I reflect upon is shaped by the regard I imagine others might have of me. This reflective knowledge, I have of myself, is continually historically modified by my ongoing relations with others. Ongoing historical social relations, by way of their effect on my self-regard thus necessarily affect my subjectivity. Thus Sartre shows that relations with others play a role in the historical constitution of subjectivity, yet maintains the ontological priority of transcendent freedom. The subject, in relations with others, is constituted, in part, by these relations, as is the case with Foucault's conception of relations of power.

It is the historicisation of ontology that Sartre's account of social relations makes clear. Sartre in fact argues that a subject, "which would exist without even suspecting the possibility of being an object... simply would not be a 'man'"[119]. "My being-for-others as the upsurge of my consciousness into being has the character of an absolute event... a prehistoric historicisation," *but*, "it is as fact – as a primary and perpetual fact – not as an essential necessity that we shall study being-for-others."[120] We study human beings who exist amongst the historical contingencies of social relations, yet we can nonetheless posit a universal condition of being-for-itself entailed in the nothingness behind intentionality. Thus Sartre avoids the a-historical synthesis of interiority and exteriority in his account of relations with others. We are who we are because of our ongoing social relations, but we are also not what we are. At the primary level of non-reflective consciousness, our transcendent freedom remains untouched. This is important: at the level of ontological abstraction from the ongoing becoming of social and historical existence, we are fundamentally free, yet from the primary *act*[121] of intention to more complex interrelationships with others, this primary ontological freedom is shaped by the historical

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[118] *Ibid*: 282.
[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *ibid:* 282-3. It is important to bear in mind here that, for Sartre, existence precedes essence, the existentialist argument from Heidegger that the apprehension of being is always partly determined by the factual experience of being and historical situation (Heidegger, M. 1975: §5).
[121] i.e. event, rather than a state of presence, abstracted from temporal becoming

contingencies of one's situation. Consequently, in Sartre's account, ongoing, historically contingent relations with others shape subjectivity, yet we are free.

Section 4: Hell is other people

In the ontology of *Being & Nothingness*, we find an ambiguity between the transcendent, universal, condition of being-for-itself on the one hand, and being-for-others on the other, the latter aspect of subjectivity exposed to the contingencies of social existence. Being-for-others is a mode of being an object of consciousness. One's autonomy is undercut by the effect of others on reflective consciousness, resulting in an ambiguous tension between the two modes of being that results in a conflict of interests. Thus, "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others." [122] The synthesis of these opposing interests in mutual recognition, Sartre rejects on the basis of the radical alterity of being-for-itself and being-for-others. I pose this problem of conflict, to go on to show that there is a dialectical mediation of interests implicit in Sartre's ontology, which I will use to explain how the notion of freedom is entailed by his account of co-constitutive relations of power.

The chapter of *Being & Nothingness*, 'On Concrete Relations with Others, outlines two distinct modes of subjectivity, resulting in conflict, that are possible if either participant desires to overcome the fundamental ambiguity between being-for-itself and being-for-others that social relations entail. Sartre illustrates the conflict between these two modes of being as a relation between sadism and masochism. We shall see how both attempts to overcome the ambiguity of being-for-itself and being-for-others entailed by social relations, through synthesis, are doomed to frustration, and lead to conflict. My broader task is to show how relations of power mediate freedom, so that I may defend Foucault's line on the political and historical mediation of subjective freedom.

The mode of concrete relations with others that is sadism, or mastery, involves fleeing from the objectifying gaze of the other. This is the flight to transcendence, which denies

[122] Sartre, JP. *B&N*, 1956: Chapter 3, §1: 364.

our facticity. Like the voyeur looking through the keyhole, the sadist loses awareness of his being-in-itself, being-for-others, through intentional enthralment with the object of his attention. Relations with others entail an ambiguity between being-in-itself and being-for-itself, which the sadist hides from himself in bad faith, treating the other as a mere object of his attention, to hide the object of attention that he is for the other as subject[123]. Fleeing his facticity, he tries to sustain the illusion of transcendent ontological freedom in the face of existential, historical inter-subjectivity in an attempt to overcome the dependence of his freedom on the regard of the other[124]. The masochist, by contrast, tries to be a mere object of the sadist's attention, and not a subject that looks back with regard, undermining the sadist's pure transcendence[125]. Thus she flees her transcendence.

The sadist and the masochist can pursue domination or submission respectively, only by blinding themselves to its futility – he cannot be pure transcendence, and she cannot be pure facticity. To flee the ambiguity of co-constitutive transcendence and facticity is an unstable project, requiring ongoing maintenance, the wilful imaginary suspension of the historical becoming of human being. The masochist, for example, cannot *choose* to be pure facticity, thus it is in bad faith to seek to do so[126]. Bad faith is the attempt to escape the ambiguity of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, or, being-for-others, which is a mode of the in-itself. The desire for completeness in oneself necessarily meets with frustration, since one is affected by the regard of others[127]. The pursuit of self-present identity, which I explain in the following section in terms of the "God Project," undermines itself, whether this is through mastery or submission. One cannot reconcile the ambiguity of one's identity, between being-for-oneself and being-for-others, by denying either term. The attempt to escape this ambiguity is proved to be impossible in ongoing social relations due to the problem of recognition: one's self, as a presence in the world, is affected by the regard of others.

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[123] Sartre, JP. *B&N. 1956:* Chapter 3, §2: 381.
[124] Martin, T, 2002: 102.
[125] Sartre, JP. *B&N. 1956:* Chapter 3, §1: 368.
[126] *Ibid:* 369.

Section 5: On the (im)possibility of historical closure (The God-Project)

Sartre describes as the God-project, the desire to be for-oneself-in-oneself, the foundation of one's being. It involves a desire to hang onto transcendence or facticity in social relations, despite the effect of the other on reflective consciousness. The God-project is the desire to be the foundation of one's own being, being-in-itself-for-itself. The underlying impossibility of this desire dooms relations involving such a desire to bad faith. Both sadism and masochism entail bad faith in so far as each aspires to overcome the fundamental ambiguity between being-for-itself and being-for-others. This inevitably involves denying one's transcendence, or one's facticity, and/or denying the transcendence or facticity of the other.

It is the antagonism entailed by this effort which, in Sartre's account, dooms most social relations to failure, excessively insistent on the autonomy and interiority of the transcendent subject, and thereby refusing mediation between self and other, being-for-itself and being-in-itself. "Conflict," as Sartre put it, "is the original meaning of my being-for-others."[128] The attempt to overcome ambiguity of identity in social relations brings one to an impasse.

The sadist's desire to be pure transcendence is undermined by his dependence on the recognition of this transcendence by that which he wishes to treat as being-in-itself. Likewise the masochist's flight from transcendence is undermined by her dependence on the recognition of the sadist. The masochist must consciously attract the gaze of the sadist, which undercuts her facticity. In both cases the instability of the desire for self-present identity – being-for-itself-in-itself – the God-project - proves impossible. The attempt to deny the dependence of identity on its relation with alterity results in the antagonism of conflicts of interest - relations of power - that meet an impasse, as follows: conflict cannot be overcome in a mediation of interests, if either party attempts to flee the

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[127] Butler, J. 1987: 152.
[128] Sartre, JP. *B&N*, 1956: 363.

ambiguity this entails for their identity. Transcendent freedom, which we have analysed in response to Zizek and Taylor's objection to Foucault, is shown by Sartre's account to lead to an antagonistic impasse if – contrary to Foucault - one denies the mediation of subjectivity with the ongoing, historical contingencies of social interaction.

Is there a way around the impasse generated by the God-project? In Sartre's account, there seems to be an absence of mediation between individuals, an apparent denial of the possibility of achieving harmonious social relations, and the resolution of conflict. Resolution is impossible in Sartre's account given the alterity between being-for-itself and being-for-others. Social existence entails an ambiguity between the two, and there is no possibility of overcoming their difference. Nevertheless it remains to be seen whether there may not be a middle ground – a Third Way - between conflict and harmony, impasse and the impossible goal of overcoming conflicts of interest once and for all. It is with appeal to a particular temporal notion of dialectical becoming that I wish to address this problem of finding a way around conflicts of interest in the face of primary ontological alterity.

In the following two sections I suggest a way around the impasse discussed, with an Hegelian reading of the confrontation between self and other in social relations, without implying resolution. Dialectical analysis reveals, by way of a critique of logical identity, that what may be seen as an irresolvable impasse in the context of relations amongst autonomous subjects can be 'resolved' only in terms of an *ongoing* effort towards the self-consciously *ideal* goal of overcoming the ambiguity of beings-for-self being-for-others. Social relations ought therefore to take the form of good faith. This would amount to what Verstraeten calls the Genuine Infinite – the self-conscious acknowledgement of the impossibility of being-for-itself-in-itself whilst engaging in the perpetual renewal of the desire to overcome the ambiguity entailed by being-for-itself and being-for-others[129] - i.e. recognising, and being recognised by the other, without objectifying either her, or

[129] The similarities between this idea and Nietzsche's notion of the Eternal Return are worth pursuing with reference to authenticity.

oneself, in response[130]. A dialectical analysis of the apparent impasse between being-for-self and being-for-others demonstrates how this is possible in Sartre's account.

Section 6: Dialectical Technicalities

This section will introduce the dialectical methodology I will use to explain why concrete ongoing historical relations with others do not undermine transcendent ontological freedom. In accordance with his denial of the overcoming of ontological alterity between self and other, Sartre denies that his analysis of social relations is in any way dialectical. In *Being & Nothingness*, he argues specifically against a dialectical interpretation of social relations, rejecting Hegel's philosophy as succumbing to an epistemological and ontological 'optimism'[131]. Sartre's main objection to Hegel's account of self-consciousness is that it is constitutive of the self. For Sartre, social relations are exclusively *a posteriori*, whereas for Hegel the relation with the other is constitutive of the self.[132] Sartre argues that Hegel has neglected to account for the ontological rift between self and other, having rejected an account of self-consciousness that admits of intrinsic relational structures between self and other. This refusal to let go of a conception of freedom, transcending, and prior to, social relations, coupled with Sartre's reading of Hegelian synthesis as overcoming difference in the whole, leads him to deny a dialectical interpretation of his account of concrete relations with others, since he believes this undermines transcendent freedom.

By contrast with Sartre, my reading of Hegelian dialectics rejects the interpretation of synthesis as overcoming. It is such an interpretation of synthesis which I wish to challenge in this section, in order to clear the way for a dialectical interpretation of concrete relations with others, which reveals a way past the impasse Sartre describes without denying ontological alterity responsible therefore. In doing so, I furthermore critique what Derrida calls a "metaphysics of presence". The 'presence' of something is

[130] The genuine infinite could perform the task of providing an impossible ideal, whose very impossibility informs the ever-renewing activity of ethical deliberation. This is similar to the Derridean/Levinasian ideal of justice as the impossible ideal to which law aspires.
[131] Sartre, JP: *B&N*: 185.

its essential identity outside of the contingent changes affecting it through time, i.e. its form or essence. Hegelian dialectics rejects ontological assumptions of presence, such as the classic liberal presumption of the pre-constituted individual entering into relations with other such subjects in social contract theory, for example. Hegel's dialectical rejection of logical identity draws out the mistake of presuming self-presence in the face of ambiguous, historically contingent relational ambiguity.

The critique of logical identity, combined with an interpretation of the dialectic which overcomes Sartre's objections to Hegelian synthesis, makes sense of the possibility of 'resolving' the irreducible tension between being-for-self and being-for-others without undermining their abstracted ontological alterity from one another. There are thus two elements to watch out for in this section: firstly, the critique of the logic of identity and metaphysics of presence and, secondly, the distinct interpretation of synthesis as an ongoing process which resists the stable resolution of contradictory terms. The following section will use these theoretical tools of analysis to resolve the problem of the impasse in concrete social relations discussed in relation to Sartre.

I present this technical account of Hegel's dialectical method to avoid potential misunderstandings with regard to its practical application in Sartre's social ontology, particularly in light of Sartre's rejection of dialectical synthesis. The principle of dialectics explains relations between contradictions as a relation between thesis and anti-thesis, in synthesis. This dialectical principle has been interpreted with various meanings - sometimes irreconcilably. The root of dialectics is the idea of a relation between a thing and its contradiction. Opinion divides over the nature of that relation. Let us begin, then, with the classic Aristotelean principle of logic - the foundation of philosophical argument, one might say: the law of non-contradiction.

According to Aristotle, a thing cannot simultaneously be both itself and not itself. For Ψ to be Ψ, it cannot be not-Ψ. Identity entails non-contradiction, appealing to a Platonic conception of being as presence. It entails an understanding of language, which posits a

[132] See Verstraeten, P. "Hegel and Sartre" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, 1992: 368-369.

direct relation between signifier and signified. When I say "horse", the word refers to nothing but a horse. The relations between "horse" and all that is not horse (zebra-ness for example) are unnecessary elements of the meaning of "horse". This principle of non-contradiction is the basis of philosophical argument, such as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens.* If one premise contradicts another, then an argument is either sustained, or falls flat. All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, and therefore Socrates is mortal. We find a stable, reliable foundation for logical argument in the related principles of non-contradiction and identity, notably in matters of personal identity.

This principle, which Platonic metaphysics entails, has, however, come under much recent criticism, for example in Derrida's concept of *differance* whereby the identity of a term is acquired through its relation with what it is not. A similar point is clearly evident in Trotsky's introductory *The ABC of Materialist Dialectics,* which makes the following criticism of the principle of identity. "The axiom 'A is equal to A' signifies that a thing is equal to itself *if it does not change*, that is, if it does not exist!"[133] By this statement he identifies a flaw with analytic logic, which is no doubt the basis of the "T1, T2" annotations found in much analytic philosophy which appear to acknowledge the obligation to point out the abstraction of each present moment described, from its historical, temporal flux. Trotsky argues that existence entails uninterrupted transformation through time. Through erosion, for example, a basic rock changes shape. The elements, amongst which a thing must exist, change it. Things exist only in relation, through time, and therefore change constantly. Identifying a thing in its static moment of being, is therefore, necessarily, an abstraction from existence. Dialectics self-consciously incorporates the historical, temporal motion of becoming into the a-temporal abstraction from existence conducted by theory.

Contrary to the intuition that the opposite of that which is true must be false, Hegel criticized "ordinary thinking" for not seeing the positive side of contradiction. He saw in the law of identity ($\Psi = \Psi$) an empty tautology, bereft of content, leading nowhere. In an early piece of writing, prior to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he gave two arguments

[133] Trotsky, L. *The ABC of Materialist Dialectics*, 1939: 2.

against the principle of identity: 1) Just as the law of identity distinguishes identity from difference, so identity is different from difference. This means that to be different is part of the very nature of identity, as Derrida's critique of metaphysics of presence maintains. 2) If the answer to a question like 'What is a plant?' were simply, 'A plant,' then the purity of the principle of identity can be preserved, but no new knowledge gained. Our questions ask for more than simple, abstract identity, and thus the principle of non-contradiction is of limited usefulness[134].

According to Hegel, Ψ has not- Ψ, its contradiction, in its very nature; contradiction is internal to every category. Furthermore, ideas, which appear in contradiction, are conceptually mediated by tendencies within them: "It is the prerogative of the philosopher to see that everything, which, taken apart, is narrow and restricted, receives its value by its connection with the whole."[135] Identity is only rendered actual to the extent that the identity of a thing is mediated through that from which it is different. The Hegelian subject, for example, "is not a self-identical subject who travels smugly from one ontological place to another, it *is* its travels."[136] That is to say, the subject is never self-identical. It *is* – it becomes – only to the extent that it is enacted in the world. Existence entails becoming.

We saw a similar notion in the concept of intentionality in the previous chapter. What the object reveals and what consciousness contributes are indistinguishable, which undermines the subject-object divide. Hegel demonstrated this in the following critique of Cartesian dualism, which he sees to be a result of the dualism distinguishing the subject from the external world of objects.

> Neither the Subjective, by itself, nor the Objective, by itself, fills up consciousness. The pure Subjective is as much abstraction as the pure Objective... It is in view of the identity of the Subject and Object that I posit things outside of me with as much certainty as I posit myself: things exist just as certainly as I myself exist.[137]

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[134] Hegel, GWF in Wilde, L. *Logic: Dialectic and Contradiction.* 1992: 277.
[135] Hegel, GWF. "Preface" to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1977: 9.
[136] Butler, J. 1987: 8.
[137] Hegel, GWF in Kojève, A. 1969: 151.

What we see in Hegel's dialectical method is an attempt to make lucid the ambiguities of antagonistic, yet co-constitutive relationships, with the synthesis of the subject and object of intentionality, in perception. Entailed by synthesis is the idea that nothing is ever self-present. A thing's identity is always bound up in its relations with that which it is not. To put it mildly, however, there has been some confusion over the extent to which Hegel finds unity in antagonism. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* appears to set up a totalising system, which *overcomes* all difference in a synthesis of the Absolute at the end of history. "Absolute knowledge, which reveals the *totality* of Being, can be realised only at the *end* of History."[138] From the primary ontological contradiction between being and nothingness, synthesised in becoming, each dialectic feeds into the next through consciousness, self-consciousness and historical social structures towards a final end alleged to resolve all contradiction. I will argue, however, that the uninterrupted movement of time implicit in ongoing historical realisation undermines the idea that there can be a final realisation of the end[139] of History.

The 'realisation' of the end of history is in fact illustrated as impossible in the following , illuminating, etymological analysis of the very word 'realisation', thereby making space for a re-interpretation of the meaning of the 'end of history' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The two parts of the word – 'real', and '-ation' (entailing manufacture) implies a dialectical reading of the word in terms of becoming, as opposed to being. Realisation is the making-real, yet reality is the given, the fact, which undermines the construction implied by 'realisation'. 'Realisation' carries the sense of grasping a reality that is already there, yet it carries the further sense of also creating that reality. This illustrates the nature of intentional subject-object relations in perception: our projection into the world, of the world. We realise, but on closer inspection, must understand the constructed-ness of our realisation, implying a certain un-reality if taken purely from the point of view of the object. This undermines our realisation, showing how the grasping of reality is co-constituted by its opposite - fiction. The documentary tells a story. Realisation is

[138] Kojève, A. 1969: 32.
[139] In the sense of 'means and *ends*'

simultaneously a bringing of reality to oneself and oneself to reality, in manufacture. It is, strictly speaking, impossible – a contradiction.

Hegel's critique of Cartesian subject-object dualism discussed earlier illustrates the co-constitutive effect which such contradictory terms have on each other through activity, that is, as events unfold through historical progression. In his descriptions of synthesis, Hegel always sustains the tension between thesis and anti-thesis, as we see in §161 of *PS*:

> The positive and negative stimulate each other into activity. Being is posited as not-being, suspended in unity. The two distinguished moments both subsist; they are implicit and are opposite in themselves, that is, each is the opposite of itself; each has its 'other' within it and they are only one unity.

This unity, as we see, is not a static unity, but *movement*, uninterrupted, ongoing. The antagonism is thus the dialectical relation. The *relation* is its unity. Hence, synthesis is not an overcoming but the bond that ties thesis to anti-thesis in a never-completed becoming. Hegel's *PS* suggests the impossibility of closure within experience, within time.

As Judith Butler explains, "We begin with the determinate, the particular, and the immediate [i.e. the thesis], and treat it as if it were absolute, and then learn through that misplaced certainty that the Absolute is broader, more internally complicated than we thought."[140] This is the *movement* entailed by dialectical negation. It is movement towards an ever-receding end-point, but is nonetheless movement – a cyclical surpassing of itself. The mutual antagonism between thesis and anti-thesis must not be understood – under the interpretation of dialectics as *over*coming I have argued against – as therefore entailing stasis. Synthesis is progress, through antagonism, towards an end-point, which must be surpassed. The end, or goal, of history is continually surpassed, through historical becoming. No term can remain static if it is to have meaning, direction. As Lenin wrote in the ironically titled, in light of the following insight, *The End of Classical German Philosophy:* "For dialectical philosophy nothing is final, absolute, sacred. It

[140] Butler, J. 1987: 23.

reveals the transitory character of everything and in everything; nothing can endure before it except the uninterrupted process of becoming and of passing away."[141]

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* we witness this process of becoming in the frustrated attempts of self-consciousness to realize itself through its relations with alterity. The subject continually mistakes stasis for truth, attempting to impose presence on the flux of becoming, "purporting to present exhaustively the full reality of the object at hand," [142] only to be undone by ensuing contradictions. Synthesis betrays the possibility of static, self-present instantiation. Self-consciousness can only present itself within a relation of antitheses, lending it an illusion of presence, which must be undone. The ongoing becoming of synthesis entails the continual constitution and undoing of subjectivity through relations with other subjects. The antagonism is irresolvable, yet – contra Sartre - this need not prevent us from *aiming* towards the resolution of conflicts of interest.

Recognising the ambiguous co-constitutive dynamics of conflicting social relations, coupled with acknowledgement of the impossibility of overcoming the difference entailed by individual transcendence, might allow each party to work towards overcoming the impasse of a conflict of interests, without expecting their respective individual interests to be fully satisfied, recognising that individual freedom is mediated through relations with others. This section has laid out an important tool for the task of such a re-interpretation of Sartre's account: a critique of logical identity within a non-teleological dialectical framework, which I shall use once again in chapter three. Synthesis reveals the co-constitutive nature of contradictory terms through temporal processes such that even the ideal of harmony towards which social relations should be directed, is shaped by discord throughout the ongoing process of history. In time, the ideal is made manifest as ambiguity.

[141] Engels, F: §2.
[142] Butler, J. 1987: 27.

Section 7: Overcoming Conflict & Ambiguity: An End Without End

In this section I interpret Sartre's account of concrete social relations according to the dialectical methodology developed in the previous section to show how the impasse between self and other addressed in section three might be unblocked. Despite Sartre's rejection of dialectics I believe that, given the interpretation of synthesis for which I argue, it both accords with and helps to make sense of his account of social relations in *Being & Nothingness*. Such an understanding overcomes the difficulties Sartre runs into trying to account for transcendent freedom in the context of inter-subjectivity. I use the notion of synthesis developed in the previous section to hold onto the transcendence of the terms of opposition in Sartre's account of social relations without necessitating an impasse. If dialectical synthesis is restricted to the form of becoming, rather than overcoming, we see that its relation with alterity undermines the radical interiority of consciousness. Yet subjectivity is not reducible to this relation. Social relations and personal freedom are at odds, yet this need not result in an impasse.

We saw in the analysis of intentionality in the previous chapter that subjectivity, for Sartre, is necessarily imbricated in the object-world. The subject has both transcendence and facticity. Intentionality was explained in terms of dialectical synthesis. In this section I reveal a dialectical relationship at work between being-for-itself and being-for-others with reference to Hegel's understanding of the struggle for recognition, involving an acknowledgement of the God-project's ideality in the face of ongoing relations of power. Dialectical analysis of the God-project demonstrates that the human subject is simultaneously independent of and essentially interrelated with others, with a similarly ambiguous ontology. It shows that self-consciousness is impossible to achieve without relations with others. This contact, however, is also the basis of conflicts of interests fundamental to human existence.

Let us begin with a dialectical analysis of Sartre's account of concrete social relations described in section two. To recall, the self, in the act of intentionality, is merely that which is not its object. There is that, and I am not that, therefore I am. Only through

absence does one become aware of oneself. One is thus dependent on the object of one's awareness in order to know oneself as independent. I am being-for-itself, but the only way I know this is through the being-in-itself of which I am aware. This dependence undermines the independence that constitutes me. The subject is subjectively certain of herself, aware of herself as ontologically distinct from that which she contemplates. But this subjective certainty is incomplete. The subject must find the private idea she has of herself in external objective reality[143] in order that her subjective self-awareness attains the same level of objectivity as objects in reality, transcending the whims of her imagination.

On Hegel's interpretation, since I cannot gain recognition of my transcendence through relations with objects, to attain objective knowledge of being-for-self I must desire another desire. Such is the desire for recognition: the desire *of* being-for-self to be known *by* being-for-self *as* being-for-self.

> To desire non-Being is to liberate oneself from Being, to realize one's autonomy, one's Freedom. To be anthropogenetic, then, Desire must be directed towards a non-Being – that is, towards another *Desire*, another greedy emptiness, another *I*. For Desire is the absence of Being... and not a Being that *is*.[144]

Being-for-self can only find objective verification of its being-for-self by being-for-others. As Hegel argued, "a self-consciousness exists only *for* [emphasis added] a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-conscious; only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it."[145] In the other, the subject hopes to find the independent embodiment of the negation that she *is*, the reflection of her-self. The subject desires to know herself as desire, and thus recognize her independence. This is necessary for the attainment of self-consciousness. "The human reality can only be social... Man can appear on earth only within a herd."[146] With the critique of identity entailed by dialectical intentionality, the desire for self-present awareness of one's independence is undermined by inter-dependence. One cannot be the ground of one's own recognition.

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[143] Kojève, A. 1969: 11.
[144] Kojève, A. 1969: 40.
[145] Hegel, GWF. *Phenomenology of Spirit:* §177.
[146] Kojève, A. 1969: 6.

This has important implication for the God-project, which Sartre describes as leading to an impasse, involving necessary conflicts of interest in social relations.

Dialectical analysis illustrates the problem of Sartre's impasse. On the one hand one finds oneself through one's relations with others: the other is the condition of objective self-certainty. However, this means one also loses oneself in an-other: I am dependent on the recognition of the other for proof of my being-for-self. I only find evidence of my independence, in dependence. Given the God-project, the attempt to be-in-itself-for-itself, this explains the necessary conflicts of interest entailed in social relations. The initial encounter with the other is a "narcissistic project, which fails through the inability to recognise the other's freedom."[147] The subject expects a passive medium of reflection for itself not realising the other wants the same thing. She wants to overcome her dependence, to be recognised as being-for-itself, but for that recognition to satisfy her, she has to know that the other is also a subject, who wants to be recognised as being-for-itself. Thus the desire for recognition leads to an impasse with both individuals in a relation seeking to reclaim their autonomy.

Dialectical analysis demonstrates that we are never alone and run into conflict with each other when we attempt to overcome the inter-dependence of our identities on the recognition of others, or when recognition is not mediated with reciprocation. Being-for-self inevitably involves relations with others, which affect the very constitution of one's identity. In contrast to much of Western political philosophy, which assumes that freedom is constituted in the individual, prior to the conflict entailed by social relations, this anticipates the necessary frustration of the attempt to overcome the dependence of one's identity on the recognition of others[148], and the violence that is necessary in the attempt to impose it. It explains basic conflicts of interest within an inter-subjective, temporal, framework wherein one's ongoing relations with others complicate self-present

[147] Butler, J. 1989: 146.
[148] I.e. the 'God-project'

'interest'[149]. The "self" of self-consciousness can be no more than an abstraction from the ongoing historical becoming of being. As we shall see later in our discussion of Foucault's conception of relations of power, this has crucial bearing on the "self" of self-interest.

Rife with contradictions, the God-project cannot be sustained. Self-interest generates inter-subjectivity, but only though conflict. The ideal state of nature, in which we are beholden to no one but ourselves, is an unsustainable abstraction from the historical unfolding of social existence. "The being that acts to satisfy his own instincts, which – as such – are always *natural*, does not rise above Nature," writes Kojève[150]. Social existence removes us from an 'ideal' state of nature, to a situation in which our freedom can be realised only through relations with others. This points to the problem with an a-historical, universal account of a state of nature in political theory. Abstracted from its historical situation, our freedom is meaningless. Individual freedom is constituted in ongoing relations with others. We are permanently tied up in human history; our independence dialectically bound to dependence.

Dialectical analysis resolves the impasse between being-for-self and being-for-others entailed by the God-project. Contrary to Sartre's objection to dialectics, the God-project can be interpreted in terms of dialectical synthesis as a temporal device. This mechanism mirrors the temporality entailed by dialectical synthesis. The ongoing attempt to overcome the ambiguity between being-for-itself and being-for-others gives *sens*,[151] or direction, and thus meaning, to the mutual antagonism of the co-constitutional relationship between the antithetical terms of self and other. Thus the god-project informs the movement, the *temporalisation* of the modes of interaction in Sartre's account of concrete relations with others. It moves conflict forward, freeing the antithetical terms of being-for-self and being-for-others from static antagonistic presence, thereby making space for their historical becoming in relation to one another. The terms of self and other,

[149] An everyday example would be that my interest in acquiring an expensive car is not un-related to the status accorded to it by others. Thus my interests are socially mediated in historically contingent relations of power, not self-constituted, prior to such relations.
[150] Kojève, A. 1969: 42.

abstracted from each other in their ambiguous relations with each other, make sense (*sens*) through their effect on one another as time unfolds. Activity affects the beings who enact it. Remember that Sartre, an existentialist, states explicitly that freedom exists in situation, which is historical, temporal: existence precedes essence; being is becoming.

The desire to be God is the desire of the for-itself to be the foundation of its own being, but the in-itself is the guarantee of the for-itself's failure[152] since it transcends consciousness. Such frustration is, in turn, the ground of the ongoing renewal of desire, impelled forward by the impossible goal of satisfaction. As with the *sens* of Hegel's end of history, this imaginary ideal is the motor of development, giving direction to the antagonistic relation between self and other by way of temporality, but never allowing resolution. This accords with Heidegger's belief that the original constitution of *Dasein* is temporality. "Time is the horizon from which something like being becomes at all possible."[153] Both Hegel's conceptions of synthesis, directed towards an unrealisable end, and the desire for self-present consciousness, reflect the *sens* of the desire to be God.

Verstraeten demonstrates that in *Being & Nothingness* "the effect of desire is to motivate behaviour by the revelation of its lack with respect to the in-itself-for-itself"[154]. Hegel reveals this lack through his conception of the co-constitution of the finite and infinite. Just as the positing of a limit entails the possibility of overstepping the limit, so the desire for self-identity cannot overcome the contingency of existence, the compulsion to keep choosing. Sartre misinterprets Hegel's 'end of history' as a destination rather than a direction, a denial of this necessary 'overstepping of the limit'.

Yet, contrary to Sartre's anti-teleological rejection of synthesis, "there is an ultimate resurgence of the dialectic... at the level of absolute knowledge in Hegel: the necessary overstepping of limits."[155] Sartre unwittingly accords with Hegel that "it is in vain to

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[151] The sense of '*sens*' being both direction and meaning (i.e. sense)
[152] Butler, J. 1987: 95.
[153] Heidegger, M. "The Basic Problems of Phenomenology", 19xx: §4.
[154] Verstraeten: 363.
[155] Verstraeten: 365.

attempt to essentialise into eternity the finite obtaining of the object of desire."[156] The unceasing renewal of the desire to overcome alterity through the impossible task itself is the meaning of the becoming of self-consciousness. This is the *sens* of the God-project and Hegel's end of history.

Flynn argues similarly to Verstraeten, emphasizing the existential side of Sartre's phenomenological existentialism: "Existential ontology is itself historical... the appearance of the for-itself is, properly speaking, the irruption of history into the world."[157] There is no being, or presence, in being-for-itself beyond historical becoming wherein the transcendence of the for-itself is compromised by being-for-others, regardless of the abstract ontological distinction made by Sartre. Sartre argued that since no end-terminus of history is possible, one cannot take a measure of history from outside (as he believes Hegel attempts) looking back from the point of view of the end of history. If history does not end, the dialectic cannot confirm itself because, if there is no whole, there is no dialectic.[158] However if we posit the 'end of history' as an unattainable goal giving *sens* to being as historical becoming in terms of 'direction toward'', there appears to be no deep disagreement between Sartre and Hegel.

The dialectical interpretation of the God-project I have given helps reconcile Sartre's notion of transcendent freedom with an inter-subjective ontology, without succumbing to the pitfall which Sartre wished to avoid: that of overcoming difference through co-constitutive relation[159] - the impossible realisation of the in-itself-for-itself[160]. In addition, we thus overcome a certain 'poverty' in *Being & Nothingness* that is frequently alluded to by commentators[161]. This involves the criticism that that there is an absence of mediation between self and other in Sartre's looking/looked-at model of social relations, which

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[156] Sartre, JP in Verstraeten: 367.
[157] Sartre, JP, in Flynn, T. 1977: 45.
[158] Sartre, JP, in Flynn, T. 1977: 46.
[159] Verstraeten: 369.
[160] This is because the 'being' of 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself' are revealed always already to be involved in historical becoming, whereby their presence is complicated by the temporal activity of negation
[161] See Martin, T, 2000: 109-110; Flynn, T. 1977: 60; Verstraeten: 369-370; Butler, J. 1987: 157; Merleau-Ponty, De Beauvoir, and later Sartre himself in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* tried to overcome these problems

gives rise to difficulties in accounting for the kind of collective subjectivity experienced by the group[162]. The mediation, I believe, that Sartre needs is to be found in a dialectical interpretation of social relations he expressly avoided.

We are now able to resolve the impasse from the end of section three: The sadist's desire to be pure transcendence is undermined by her dependence on the recognition of this transcendence by that which she wishes to treat as being-in-itself. Likewise the masochist's flight from transcendence is undermined by her dependence on the recognition of the sadist, which she must *seek*. The masochist must consciously attract the gaze of the sadist, which undermines her denial of transcendence. In both cases the instability of the desire for self-present identity is revealed, and the attempt to deny the dependence of identity on its relation with alterity results in the antagonism of relations of power.

The struggle for recognition between two *independent* selves, ultimately – if one's interests could be abstracted to the level of individuality, which the dialectic proves to be impossible - leads to an impasse. The project of overcoming the ambiguity of identity involved in social relations is not achievable. But if it is recognized as an ideal bound to frustration, entailing recognition of the impossibility of achieving self-presence[163], this ideal nonetheless allows for movement and development of social relations towards the impossible ideal of overcoming conflicts of interest.

An Hegelian reading of Sartre's analysis of concrete relations with others reveals a co-constitutive relationship between self and other wherein each simultaneously undermines and reinforces the other's freedom. Self-consciousness is objectively grounded in the other's recognition, even as one's subjectivity eludes the other, and vice versa. The movement of recognition is both mutual and impossible due to the transcendent alterity that motivates it. Sartre's worry that difference is subsumed by synthesis is unfounded since synthesis need not entail an overcoming of difference. The dialectic in fact explains

[162] Recall the impasse described earlier in terms of the sadomasochistic tendencies in concrete relations with others

how freedom can subsist in an inter-subjective framework where social relations are historically ongoing.

Section 8: Defending Resistance

I will now use the dialectical ontology of freedom in relations with others, developed in response to Sartre's account of social relations, to defend Foucault's account of power and against Zizek and Taylor's objections to its incoherence on the subject of freedom. Sartre's account of freedom meets the requirements Zizek and Taylor find lacking in Foucault, as I argued in section two. Yet having analysed the implications of social relations for the subject in Sartre's account we find individual freedom necessarily mediated by relations with others, which are historical and ongoing. I will thus draw on these findings in order to demonstrate the ontological coherence of Foucault's account of freedom in the face of all-pervasive relations of power. From the ontology of subject-object relations in chapter one, we have moved to social ontology. Being-for-itself is historically tied to being-in-itself, and now being-for-others. Foucault's characterisation of subjective freedom is not incompatible with that of Sartre, given a dialectical reading of the relation between self and other, despite the disagreements between the two philosophers. In addition, we will see how Foucault's move to the theorisation of productive power relations overcomes the discourse-centred structuralism of his Archaeological approach discussed in chapter one[164].

In the section, to defend Foucault's definition of 'power' and 'resistance' without resorting to self-present terms, I will explain the meaning of each by appealing to the relational model of being-for-self and being-for-others, developed in the previous section. The immanent dialectical critique of self-presence, read through Sartre's analysis of social relations, shows how the subject is free to resist, even as her interests are constituted in relation to the other's. Thus, in addressing Zizek and Taylor's objection, it is important that we keep in mind the status of *both* acting subjects, the agent of

[163] I.e. being-in-itself-for-itself
[164] objected to by Ricouer, Laclau and Mouffe in the previous chapter

resistance as well as the agency against which the resisting subject acts, in Foucault's account of power relations. The interests of the agents, in relations of power, are co-constitutive.

One must thus ask not only Taylor's question, "Where is the space for a subject of resistance?" Since power is relational, the opposite problem is equally pertinent: "Where is the subject of power?" Foucault's effort to restrict his analysis of power to the event, to relational co-constitutive activity, seems to undermine any attempt to uncover discrete agency of both she who exercises power, and she on whom power is exercised. This is because power is never enacted uni-directionally. The exercise of power *requires* the freedom occupied by resistance. "Power and freedom are engaged in a mutual interplay."[165] Each affects the other as they act on each other. Can either agent be abstracted from the other such that her individual freedom is maintained? The exercise of power *requires* freedom to act on the part of both agents in a power relationship. So, is this account of the 'non-subjective intentionality'[166] of power coherent?

To begin with, since I am using dialectical analysis to explain the relations between the subjects of power relations, it is important to note Foucault's rejection of dialectics. His genealogy rejects "the meta-historical deployment of ideal signification and indefinite teleologies."[167] Following Nietzsche's criticism of dialectics as involving a Socratic mode of thinking that tends towards Platonic conceptions of being, and presence[168], Foucault claims his "purposes are strictly anti-Platonic, *against* the supra-historical perspective."[169] The dialectic, according to Foucault, "is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflict by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton."[170] "With relations of power, one is faced with complex phenomena which don't obey the Hegelian form of the dialectic."[171]

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[165] Foucault, M. "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982: 221.
[166] Foucault, M. "Nietzsche, Genealogy and Power" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 341.
[167] Ibid.
[168] I.e. the doctrine of forms wherein the changeable appearance of reality is but a quality of the ideal form
[169] Ibid: 355.
[170] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge*. 1980: 115.

One must bear in mind that Foucault's philosophy was always grounded on the interpretation of concrete empirical phenomena, institutions and social practices. He uses genealogy to avoid the abstractions of continuity, emphasising instead elements of chance, accident, error and discontinuity. "There is only the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice box of chance,"[172] he quotes from Nietzsche. It would indeed be impossible for the myriad contingencies of existence to be encapsulated neatly in the form of a three-pronged dialectic of negation. One ought not make any qualms about acknowledging the necessarily abstract nature of Hegel's dialectical formula for analysing concepts. It is important to consider Foucault's assertion that the dialectic is a logical concept too facile and simplistic to be imposed on the multifarious, chaotic diversity of experience. Nevertheless contingency is not inimical to theoretical analysis.

Contrary to Foucault's understanding of the dialectic as involving a Platonic metaphysics of presence I have demonstrated throughout this chapter that the dialectic reveals the impossibility of presence. Furthermore, the theoretical tools of abstraction, which dialectical analysis brings to bear on practical concerns, resist the supra-historical overcoming of contingency. My use of dialectical analysis is restricted to an historicist critique of logical identity, which demonstrates the relational ambiguity of self presence. This helps us to better understand the dynamic involved in relations of power when the event of domination is extrapolated to opposing terms. Since Foucault argues, "power requires an other, over whom power is exercised,"[173] it is important to show how the subjects of power and resistance can be abstracted from one another.

The question is to what extent these abstracted terms are defined in Foucault's account of power. Armstrong[174] argues cogently in an article on "Foucault and the Question of Autonomy" that Zizek oversimplifies Foucault's constructivist position on the formation of subjectivity, i.e. the extent to which subjectivity is overwhelmed by the effects of power. The subject's inextricable relations with others do not cancel out freedom. It is not

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[171] Ibid: 56.
[172] Foucault, M. "Nietzsche, Genealogy and Power" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reade*: 352.
[173] Foucault, M. "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982: 220.
[174] Armstrong, A, 2003: 7, 10.

a matter of either freedom or facticity, to use Sartre's terms. Armstrong demonstrates that Foucault avoids a false opposition between social constructivism and autonomy, ruling out the traditional conception of autonomy as radical self-determination, or self-realisation, which values agency in the causal terms of good: interior (i.e. *from* the self); bad: exterior (i.e. *on* the self). According to Foucault, the project of autonomy "rests upon notions that are not invented by the individual, but which are models he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, his social group."[175] Autonomy springs from what is normally regarded as its opposite, that which affects the subject from without.

Armstrong defends Foucault from Zizek's objection that Foucault leaves no space for freedom to resist, by demonstrating how, in Foucault, autonomy is developed in relation to techniques of subjectification and disciplinary power so that we watch over ourselves, but that at the same time this autonomy allows us to be critical. We are in fact autonomous because of power relations, and as Foucault frequently argues[176], this autonomy, is what allows for the possibility of resistance. Autonomy is not something attainable in isolation, as I demonstrated, when explaining in the previous section how it is bad faith to deny the fundamental ambiguity of being-for-self and being-for-others, with the notion of "freedom in situation". Dialectical analysis helps explain such co-constitutive activity.

The historicist critique of identity and presence has direct bearing on Armstrong's argument against a dualistic conception of relations between self and other, freedom and the effects of power. Rejecting Kant's project to identify the abstract forms of transcendent consciousness thereby to derive universal, foundational, criteria for knowledge, Hegel argued there is no objective ground from which to reveal a universal account of the subject, because the distinction between subject and object is a product of the mind[177]. You cannot characterize reality in terms independent of that reality. Apart from being free, the conditions of subjectivity are historically contingent on relations of

[175] Foucault, M in Armstrong, A, 2003: 11.
[176] Foucault, M. *Foucault Live*, 1989: 207.

power. Thus the only recourse is to engage in immanent critique; not from the first principles of foundational knowledge, but rather from principles adopted in existing, historical, systems of thought, i.e. on their own terms. Through immanent critique[178], Hegel engages opposing systems of thought in their own terms, testing them against each other in the mode of dialectical analysis, wherein contradictions are shown both to constitute and undermine each other's identity in the process of becoming. This allows for an historical and relational view of reality, rather than one based on the principle of identity. A-historical, dualistic abstractions are undermined from within by immanent dialectical critique.

Hegel's immanent critique of logical identity, read through Sartre's account of social relations, shows up the problem with the sort of subjectivity demanded by Zizek and Taylor, not from an exterior position grounded upon foundational knowledge, but rather from within the very principles of identity. In the dialectic of recognition, the subject is shown to derive significance and being from the other, yet she nurtures the illusion that this signification is determined alone[179]. Sartre made the very same insight with his argument that the being of being-for-itself is not being in any recognizable sense. "Its being is never given... Since it is always separated from itself by the nothingness of otherness... its being is a perpetual deferring."[180] Being is always becoming, in time, which is why it is what it is not and is not what it is.[181]

Sartre problematized any easy understanding of the transcendental freedom of the subject, contrary to Foucault's post-structuralist criticisms of his 'humanist' account. Sartre explicitly makes a space for the relation between freedom and conditioning in his social ontology just as Foucault does in his approach to power. Howells makes the case succinctly in her analysis of Sartrean freedom: "As individuals we make ourselves on the basis of structures and circumstances that we experience as the natural texture of our existence, rather than envisaging them as limitations to a freedom that would be both un-

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[177] Smith, S, 1989: 170-174.
[178] The critique of logical identity mentioned earlier, for example
[179] Racevskis, K, 1980: 144.
[180] Sartre, JP in Howells, C. 1992: 333.

situated and disembodied."[182] Sartre's definition of freedom by the time of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* was "the little movement that makes of a totally conditioned social being a person who does not reproduce in its entirety what he received from his conditioning."[183] I believe this to accord with Foucault's conception of the freedom to resist.

Let us reconsider the notion of freedom to resist in light of the immanent critique of logical identity. If we analyse power from the Nietzschean point of view, as a relational event[184], it is clear that both terms of the activity of power, in abstraction (i.e. the subject of power and the subject of resistance), are mutually co-constitutive. This undermines either side's attempts to resolve inter-dependence through domination or submission. Power takes shape from both sides of its inherent antagonism of interests. Power and freedom are related in a complicated interplay. Freedom, as Sartre explains, exists in situation. We are always already historically involved in social relations and thus transcendent freedom only manifests itself in relation to social forces. The focus of each individual in relations with others is a necessary abstraction from the inter-dependent interests, which in addition to their differences constitute their relationship with one another. Thus, ongoing, conflicting, yet inter-dependent interests constitute power, and freedom is constituted in relation to power.

One might collapse the terms of opposition defining each subject in a relationship, if each subject is mutually involved with the other in the co-constitutive activity entailed by relations of power, and focus instead on the relation itself. This need not override the differences amongst the individuals, which constitute such a relation. Sartre was ahead of Foucault in bringing together metaphysical contingency and ontological freedom[185] insisting on freedom-*in-situation* with the phrase, "existence precedes essence." We

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[181] Sartre, JP. *B&N,* 1956: 137.
[182] Howells, C. 1992: 339.
[183] Sartre, JP in Howells, C. 1992: 340.
[184] Foucault is adamant that "Power exists only in action... as a mechanism" (*Power/Knowledge*, 1980: 89). He also argues that power does not exist as such, but is the activity of an action upon the action of others, aiming to guide the outcome of the action of the latter ("The Subject and Power" in Dreyfuss & Rabinow, 1982: 220).
[185] i.e. between the subject and object of intentional relations

become who we are in an ongoing relation with the changing world around us. Our relations with others inform both our identity and freedom, which in turn inform our relations with others. There is no freedom extrinsic to social relations, but this is not to say that freedom is thereby annulled.

Through the immanent critique of logical identity in Hegel's dialectic of recognition, and Sartre's account of being-for-others and concrete relations with others, we find the desire for self-presence is frustrated by necessary inter-dependence with others. In terms expressed by Foucault, Hegel and Sartre show how this co-dependent relationship between self and other involves relations of power. Moreover, they demonstrate that any attempt to overcome the differences between self and other leads to conflict, perhaps even an impasse. We see however that an impasse can be 'resolved' in the ongoing attempt to overcome the contradictory intentions inherent in relational activity, if mutual inter-dependence is acknowledged, coupled with an understanding that the attempt to overcome conflicts of interest is a task without end. Conflicts of interest in power relations are revealed to involve ongoing historical struggle and instability by an immanent critique of identity. This is not to say that we should not work towards overcoming conflicts of interest, but rather that the attempt to maintain self-presence[186] in an attempt to do so, is doomed to frustration.

In a co-constitutive relation of 'wills,'[187] recognising the impossibility of overcoming conflicts of interest whilst engaging in the attempt to do so, allows agents to avoid an impasse, or escalation of conflict, without denying the difference between them. The alterity that constitutes each individual subject leads to conflicts of interest in social relations, whose interplay may be understood in Foucault's terms, as relations of power. This is the antagonism entailed by relations of power. Yet such relations can be either mutually beneficial, for example in the relationship between a teacher and her student, or antagonisms can escalate to the detriment of the players when inter-dependence is denied in the impossible attempt to overcome conflicts of interest, for example in apartheid.

[186] i.e. the God-project: to overcome the ambiguity of identity entailed by being-for-itself and being-for-others, to be the ground of one's freedom

Thus we need to recognise both the difference and inter-dependence of our respective interests in order to engage in mutually beneficial activity.

Dialectical analysis of power reveals not only the coherence of subjective freedom in all-pervasive power relations, but also a way of overcoming an impasse between conflicting interests, which constitute such relations. Dialectical treatment of relations between self and other explains how Foucault is theoretically able to maintain a position for both the subject of power and the subject of resistance in his account of power, thus overcoming the objection raised by Zizek and Taylor. Subjectification does not render the subject powerless. "Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective agents who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving... may be realised. Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power."[188] The self-present autonomy Zizek and Taylor complain is lacking in Foucault's account of power is of the very sort that hinders social interaction when we try to hold onto it. By contrast, if freedom is recognised as inter-subjective, power need not manifest itself malevolently.

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[187] a 'will' can only be an abstraction from the co-constitutive relation of willing
[188] Foucault, M. in Wisnewski, J. 2000: 426.

CHAPTER THREE: POWER/KNOWLEDGE

This final chapter draws on the historicist ontology developed in the previous chapters, to argue for the need in political philosophy to take into account the historical and political contingency of claims to knowledge, and show how this impacts on justification for political critique. I defend this against Taylor's objections to such an argument, as seen in his critique of Foucault's historicist conception of the relations between power and knowledge. This chapter has two parts. I begin with the argument that Foucault's political critique takes an immanent epistemological standpoint, which rejects a-historical, universal norms and foundations. I will defend the internal coherence of immanent critique against epistemic foundationalism. I then go on to show that Foucault's power/knowledge dyad also entails a positive epistemology, which overcomes the problematic a-historicism one finds with foundational epistemology. In the first half of the chapter I argue that immanent critique is preferable to foundational critique in political philosophy. In the second half, I draw on the historicist ontology of the previous chapters to show that political philosophy needs to take into account the historical and political contingency of knowledge, as does Foucault's historicist epistemology.

PART ONE: FOUCAULT'S POLITICAL CRITIQUE

In this part I will argue that Foucault undermines and rejects the Cartesian epistemological premises of foundational political philosophy, taking the preferable standpoint of immanent critique in his historico-political analysis. By this I mean that Foucault seeks to understand the standards of rationality within existing systems of thought, on their own terms, rather than according to universal norms. I argue that since, for Foucault, knowledge is fundamentally interested, he does not adopt an objective, universal standpoint outside of political bias[189]. Instead he engages with domination by exposing its means of legitimation - the discourse and practices used to justify asymmetrical power relations. Unlike epistemic foundationalism, which engages

[189] In the second half of this chapter I will argue that Foucault's positive epistemology essentially entails that knowledge is interested.

discourses from a pre-conceived external point of view, immanent critique takes its footing on the very ground of that which it seeks to critique.

I will begin with Foucault's account of power/knowledge, contextualized with respect to three broad historical epistemological frameworks: the Cartesian, the Hegelian and the Nietzschean. I then consider Taylor's contention that Foucault's Nietzschean relativism undercuts his basis for political critique. I defend Foucault's epistemology against this objection by arguing that Taylor assumes a deficient account of power as sovereign-right, which Foucault's account of power overcomes. Lastly I argue that Foucault's political critique assumes an immanent epistemological standpoint to undermine normative, rational discourse used towards the ends of political domination.

Section One: Foucault on Power/Knowledge

In Foucault's study of sexual repression and liberation in the first volume of his history of sexuality, *The Will to Knowledge,* in which he demonstrates the circular relation between discourse and domination by means of the example of sex. *The Will to Knowledge* contends that 20th Century sexual liberation is related to a myth about Victorian repression. Our so-called liberation is in fact a product of power[190]. In seeking to liberate the inner truth of sexuality from the confines of repression, we grant privileged interpretive power to experts who subject us to systems of normalization. This is symptomatic of power's influence over our supposedly natural bodies and inclinations. Liberation of our 'inner nature' is, in fact, mediated through so-called 'experts' in systems established in hierarchical power networks, and domination is often obscured through our projects for self-fulfilment.

Liberation is the means by which disciplinary society has come to exert a normative influence over our bodies. Implicit in Foucault's argument is a critique of ideology. He demonstrates that since truth is necessarily interested, the revelation of truth is linked to

[190] Rabinow, P. in ed. Rabinow, P. *The Foucault Reader*. 1984: xvi.

power, i.e. conflicts of interest[191]. Power and knowledge are linked in a circular relation, as follows: power brings about discourse, which, in turn, is used as a basis for power. 'Liberation' from Victorian sexuality is itself mediated by power interests, which dominate individuals through techniques of subjectification. At the end of the book, Foucault brings home the point, "The irony of this deployment is in having us believe that our 'liberation' is in the balance."[192] We think we are escaping oppressive relations of power, yet our liberated sexual identities are themselves constructed in relations of power[193].

Freudian and Marxian conceptions of liberated individuality instigated particular, universal, humanist norms about self-actualisation and genuine intentions, against which repressed identity or false consciousness could be assessed, using scientific method to distinguish ideology from truth. However, by the mid-70's, Foucault had come to reject the science/ideology distinction operating in his Archaeological work. Instead, he regarded the production of knowledge as necessarily bound up with historically specific regimes of power, thus treating science as having an ideological function. Since every society produces its own truths, which Foucault argued have a normalizing and regulatory function, the genealogist needs to show how these discourses of truth operate in relation to the dominant power structures in a given society.[194]

Foucault argues, "It is in discourse that power and knowledge are brought together."[195] Knowledge and power are mutually determining and there can be no prior determining moment where knowledge or power stands outside of each other's effects. This rules out ideological critique, which finds the objective truth under the 'mystificatory realm of ideas'.[196] Even sex is mediated by power/knowledge and cannot serve as a natural

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[191] I demonstrated that social relations necessarily involve conflicts of interest, though we may work towards overcoming this conflict

[192] Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. I.* 1978: 159.

[193] As Rabinow shows, there is a note of self-referential irony here, pointing to Foucault's criticism of his previous work, which he came to believe leaned too heavily on the repressive hypothesis underlying ideological analysis (Rabinow: XVII). In Archaeology, objective discursive rules determine practice, instead of a reciprocal influence, seen in Foucault's later work.

[194] McNay, L. 1994: 25.

[195] Foucault, M. in McNay, L. 1994: 27.

[196] *Ibid*: 28.

standpoint for ideological critique. There is no deep truth independent of regimes of power. Since justice is internal to discourse, Foucault realized it makes no sense to appeal to an objective account of justice[197], discovered from the position of conflict-overcome, by means of scientific method as Marx had, for example. Science, too, governed by human interest, is subject to political manipulation. Foucault takes the post-Marxist position that political relations in part condition truth claims. There can be no point of view external to power, since knowledge is necessarily interested.

Before drawing out the Nietzschean dimension of Foucault's epistemological position, the following quote sums up Foucault's account of power/knowledge and its relevance for ideological critique:

> It has been a tradition for humanism to assume that once someone gains power he ceases to know... only those who keep their distance from power, who are in no way implicated in tyranny, shut up in their Cartesian... room, their meditations, only they can discover the truth... [Rather] the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power... Knowledge and power are implicated in one another, and there is no point dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power... 'Liberate scientific research from the demands of monopoly capitalism': maybe it's a good slogan but it will never be more than a slogan.... It was Nietzsche who specified the power relation as a general focus of philosophical discourse – whereas for Marx it was the production relation. Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory to do so.[198]

The intellectual does not rid the virus of ideology, nor emancipate truth from power. I will now show how Nietzsche's epistemology involves a response to this problem. This will help me to justify Foucault's approach to power and knowledge and the attendant epistemological standpoint his later work takes.

Section Two: Foucault's Nietzschean Epistemology

In his paper, "Foucault and Epistemology,"[199] Rorty argues that modern Western philosophy has historically taken three distinct epistemological standpoints, the Cartesian, the Hegelian and the Nietzschean.

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[197] Alcoff, L. 1990: 1
[198] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge,* 1980: 52-3.

The Cartesian viewpoint is that of the objective, rational sciences and, according to Rorty, the analytic tradition of 20th Century Anglo-American philosophy. According to this position, philosophy needs to look at the relations between statements and the objects of the hard sciences to isolate the 'nature of knowledge'.[200] Rationality is regarded as an a-historical foundation, which prevents idealism and relativity in our knowledge. It is a fixed method or process ensuring that our representation of reality corresponds to the real world[201]. By contrast, the Hegelian position treats knowledge as historically contingent. Unlike Descartes' account of the necessary conditions of knowledge, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* knowledge is shaped by the historically contingent conditions of the knowing subject. Nevertheless, Hegel's faith in the progress of history, like Marx's faith in scientific method, may be seen to allow a position from which to derive a disinterested characterisation of objective reality[202]. For Foucault, as with Nietzsche, there can be no disinterested perspective from which to assess validity, justice, or social norms.

For Nietzsche, both Cartesian and Hegelian epistemology are necessarily subservient to interest, the will, as is the case with all discourse. Nietzsche treats Hegelian teleology as a self-deceptive continuation of the Cartesian project to map our representations onto reality. Nietzsche argues there can be no rising above the present to view it in relation to enquiry in general[203]. He rejects Cartesian and Hegelian striving for a-historical foundations with which to discern true statements, unbiased by interests. Since interests necessarily mediate our knowledge of the world, there is no means by which we may check the objective correspondence of our representations with unmediated reality[204]. There is no representation independent of the will. As Foucault puts it, Nietzsche's position entails that, "we only know the world and ourselves under a description, we just happened on that description. Nature can't tell us how to apply it or whether it is the best

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[199] Rorty, R. in ed. Smart, B. *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments:* 37.
[200] Ibid: 39.
[201] *Ibid.*
[202] Synthesis, as I argued in my previous chapters, however, need not entail this ultimate standpoint, involving contradiction overcome, if contradiction is treated as ongoing.
[203] Foucault. *Power/Knowledge*: 45.
[204] *Ibid*: 46.

one; it is just the one we have chanced to latch onto. Hence neither God nor reason can give us any metaphysical comfort[205]."

Nietzsche's influence on Foucault can be traced to the culmination of Foucault's more strictly structuralist endeavours. Looking back at the archaeological edifice he had erected from which to assess the construction of discourse, Foucault self-critically drew out the implications of Nietzsche's declaration that "God is dead," for his own theory. Foucault's anti-humanist manifesto is summed up in the closing lines of the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, "You may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said, but don't imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will live longer than he.[206]" I mentioned this quote in an ontological context in the previous chapter. Let me explain the epistemological context of this quote, to demonstrate the effect Nietzsche's critique of the Cartesian subject of knowledge has on Foucault's genealogical methodology.

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* shows that shattering the illusion of a transcendent God forbids in turn the 'lie' of correspondence truth. In modern, Cartesian epistemology, God ensures that our beliefs about the world can be true. Yet faith in God entails choice. We assumed that a transcendent God could ground the objectivity of belief. Just as without assenting to belief, one cannot believe in God, according to Descartes,[207] similarly, Nietzsche argues, without interests, which give significance to experience in accordance with our chosen projects, there is no knowledge. Nietzsche emphasised, "the intellect has no further mission that might extend beyond the bounds of human life"[208]. Knowledge does not transcend human interest. Foucault argues a disinterested objective ontology of the subject cannot stand in for God as an a-historical foundation from which to derive knowledge. Neither, Foucault realized, does structuralist discourse-analysis provide objective universal foundations, which is why he later represents power (interest) and knowledge as co-constitutive.

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[205] *Ibid*: 48.
[206] Foucault, M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. 2003: 232.
[207] Descartes, R. "Fourth Meditation" in *Meditations of First Philosophy*. 1996.
[208] Nietzsche, F. "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense". 1999: 141.

For Nietzsche, we possess concepts in relation alone. Everything is conceptualised relationally; relations are a matter of interpretation: "That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from our interpretation... is a quite idle hypothesis: it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity is not essential, that a thing freed from its relationships would still be a thing."[209] Every*thing* is necessarily conceptualised, for us. There can be no justification or representation independent of interpretation and interests.

This critique of objective foundations for knowledge applies both to science and humanism. Foucault's Nietzschean epistemology does not transcend *instincts*, impulses, desires, fears, or our will to appropriate. Foucault treats knowledge as an effect of 'hatred, compromise and betrayal'[210]. If knowledge is true, this is because "it produces the truth through the... renewed falsification that establishes the distinction between the true and the untrue."[211] Genealogy exposes the history of the error of objective truth, which it rejects as useless.

> History does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules, and thus proceeds from domination to domination.[212]

Interest generates conflict and knowledge, and thus relations of power, in part, condition the truth. In genealogy, interest is posited prior to the knowledge it subordinates as instrument.

In 1970, at his opening address, delivered on accepting the position of Professor of History of Ideas at the *College de France*, Foucault proposed a genealogical undertaking. This would culminate in the latter half of the decade with an account of power/knowledge, developed through his research into disciplinary practices and the construction of sexuality. Genealogy involves the premise that there are no facts, only interpretations. All truth is from the perspective of the will, although this will is relationally, not individually, constituted. Appeals to reason and truthfulness are among the many means by which power is asserted. Since truth is necessarily interested, there

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[209] Nietzsche, F. *Will to Power*. 1968: pp 302-3.
[210] Foucault, M. in ed. Rabinow, P. *Ethics, Subjectivity and* Truth. 1990: 14.
[211] *Ibid.*

can be no universal perspective, and thus one cannot engage in critique from a universal point of view.

As Said argues, Nietzschean genealogy offered Foucault a method of undermining claims to universality, to expose the motives of such claims, thus re-orienting notions whose use has become habit-ridden and debarring of evaluation. Ideas are progressively reinterpreted through historical struggle and did not necessarily serve the purposes they do today. Various interests give shape to ideas, which thus contain a layer of meanings. Each is inherited from, and in turn, subverts, the former. Thus, knowledge claims represent struggles between the wills that impose particular meanings on them[213]. Genealogy treats rules as empty in themselves, un-finalised and impersonal, to be bent to any purpose. The successes of history belong to those who seize rules, disguise them and pervert them, to invert their meaning and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them[214]. Genealogy thus sets about exposing the struggles by which norms come about, to break them free of inertia and passivity[215]. The development of humanity is a series of interpretations, and genealogy records its history.[216]

Foucault adapted the themes of Marxism and Critical Theory to seek connections between reason and power. The Holocaust and the 1968 Paris riots had undermined any pretension of progress in the march of reason through the centuries. Reason had proved not necessarily to be the "handmaiden of freedom"[217] and there was need for a new Critical Theory. Foucault began to look at the reciprocal interplay between reason and action, discourse and practice, truth and power to see how reason is implicated in domination. Since discourse and practice assume an interrelationship, there can be no discrete ontology of either, and thus no point of view from which to establish the underlying truth of social practices and discourse[218]. Foucault thus avoids any stable

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[212] Foucault, M. "Nietzsche, Genealogy and Power" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 349.
[213] Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*. 2001: §344.
[214] Foucault, M. "Nietzsche, Genealogy and Power" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 349.
[215] Said, E. "Foucault as an Intellectual Imagination" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 39.
[216] Foucault, M. "Nietzsche, Genealogy and Power" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 350.
[217] Poster, M. *Foucault, Marxism and History*. 1984: 16.
[218] *Ibid*: 12.

foundation, such as Marxist economic functionalism, from which to stage his genealogical critique of domination through discourse.

Unlike Cartesian and Hegelian epistemology, Foucault treats knowledge as biased. His genealogies take three basic precautionary epistemic principles regarding the fundamental interrelations between power and knowledge: Firstly, he does not reject rationality but is aware that rationality is subject to hegemonic constraint. Rationality is not necessarily the handmaiden of freedom. Secondly, Foucault does not reject truth, but truth must be understood as historically contextualized, through relations of power. Lastly, the conditions of knowledge are not necessary, but are historically and politically contingent. In the following section I will consider a critique of Foucault, from a Cartesian epistemological perspective, to later explain how Foucault overcomes the problems I will go on to identify with Cartesian epistemology.

Section Three: Taylor's Critique of Power/Knowledge

Taylor and related critics of Foucault such as Habermas, Fraser and Putnam cannot imagine truth except as free from politics[219]. The rational principles governing truth claims stand apart from political debate as the *means* by which interests are contested. Taylor basically argues that Foucault's account of truth is incoherent in the context of genealogical critique. If truth is presented as relative to epistemes, then discourse is historically relative. Yet Foucault's genealogies of discipline, madness and sex entail a critical unmasking of the purposes to which discourse has been put in practice. What then, Taylor quite rightly asks, is the basis for this critique? Foucault sounds like he thinks he is external to the truth regimes he describes.[220] Foucault's genealogies look at history with an element of critique, yet he refuses to make any valuational claims, from which to derive such criticism.[221] How can genealogy liberate us from power if there is no truth independent of the regime of power? Liberation cannot be linked to a truth that transcends power, since truth, according to Foucault, depends on power.

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[219] Alcoff, L. 1990: 3.
[220] Taylor, C. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader:* 98.

With Foucault's epistemological perspective, Taylor argues, there is no way to measure gains or decreases in liberation or truth. Any truth you discover is merely the product of an appeal to claims to knowledge from the community, which you address.[222] This, I shall later prove, is correct. McNay takes the objection further, arguing that Foucault is too reductionist, and that knowledge functions in his account as little more than a function of domination. Foucault thus 'effaces the critical autonomy of knowledge'[223], although this autonomy precisely underlies the standpoint from which he launches his political critique. Foucault's epistemological standpoint is thus incoherent. Grumley argues that without universal, epistemological foundations, free of historical and political contingency, Foucault cannot distinguish eradicable and coercive relations of power, which lends his work an unfortunate fatalism[224].

The common sense objection to Foucault is that if truth, cultural values and norms are always subordinated to relations of power, this leads to straightforward relativism, the enemy of sound moral sensibility. Foucault's epistemological assault seems to leave no room for discriminatory criteria for domination or oppression. His empirical analysis is interesting, scholarly and compelling, but his epistemological standpoint, which discredits its own authority, must be misguided. This gist of the Cartesian epistemological objection to Foucault is that ideological critique needs to appeal to the truth behind the mask of power, but this is impossible in a regime-relative context.[225]

Section Four: Immanent Critique vs. Epistemic Foundationalism

My reply to the above objection has two parts. My first argument against Taylor's objection is that it entails a juridical conception of sovereign rights, which Foucault criticises obscuring the relational strategies of power situated in discourse. I use Foucault's genealogy of sovereign rights to expose the problem of a-historicism in

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[221] Wisnewski, J. 2000: 419.
[222] Taylor, C. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader:* 93.
[223] McNay, L. 1994: 64 (i.e. he discredits the authority of knowledge, from an unbiased perspective).
[224] Grumley, J. 1989: 203.

foundational epistemology. Disguising the political implications of knowledge claims makes way for a normalisation of, potentially asymmetrical, power relations (i.e. domination), as I will soon explain. Secondly, as an alternative to foundational epistemology, I examine Hegel's notion of immanent critique, which I use to defend Foucault's genealogical political analysis. Immanent critique does not rely on a-political neutrality, like epistemic foundationalism, but rather assesses the purposes served by discourses of legitimation from within their own theoretical presuppositions.

Let us begin with Taylor's objection. Epistemic foundationalism allows for criteria by which to discern disinterested, objective knowledge claims, making it possible, in theory, to posit universal human rights. On this basis, Taylor's critique of Foucault assumes the need for a universal conception of sovereign individual rights from which to distinguish the coercive abuse of power[226]. It thus appeals to a classic juridical edifice. Each individual has the pre-established right not to be tortured, for example. Power is illegitimate when it oversteps these pre-established sovereign rights[227]. In turn, sovereign rights impose limits on the right of other individuals. Political critique then serves the juridical function of preventing the abuse of pre-established rights. This grants critique the neutral role of arbitration. The theorist's political credentials assume universal neutrality.

This is precisely what Foucault's genealogy overturns. According to Foucault, the juridical conception of sovereign rights is invariably interpreted in terms of disinterested universal law, expressing repressive power, to recall the term explained in the previous chapter. Universal law is expressed exclusively in terms of prohibition, preventing either the state or the citizen from infringing on the rights of other citizens. Yet this overlooks the means by which productive power subjectifies individuals. Foucault argues, "Law is neither the truth of power nor its alibi. It is an instrument of power which is at once complex and partial."[228] Prohibition is not the principal form of investment by power.

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[225] Taylor, C. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader*: 94.
[226] Ibid: 96.
[227] Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge.* 1980: 95.
[228] *Ibid*: 117.

Power does not only prohibit; it is not so fragile as to take only the form of repression. Modern technologies of power are more productive, individualized and efficient than forced tolerance. Taylor's juridical conception of power in terms of sovereign rights, fails to take account of productive mechanisms of power, which come to affect the constitution of the individual subject, whose freedom Taylor's conception of power conceives of as prior to the politics of power. Foucault's book *Discipline & Punish* shows how norms of subjectivity are often the means by which individuals internalise the constraints of power and begin to watch over themselves.

With the development of disciplinary technology and the human sciences, power primarily incites us to internalise disciplinary norms[229] rather than forcing us to obey its commands through the more expensive mechanisms of prohibition, which generate direct resistance. By treating human rights as universal, sovereign, and a-historical, Taylor's juridical, sovereign conception of power obscures the productive power relations, which constitute the 'universal' norms we are incited towards. Thus we need a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, law and prohibition[230], but which explicitly addresses the power relations entailed in 'sovereign rights'. History has neglected the mechanisms of power by focusing exclusively on those who repressively 'held it.'[231]

Power, as I demonstrated in greater detail in my previous chapter, is not only about repression. One's interests are socially mediated in *relations* of power. Power and resistance give shape *to each other*. Foucault takes up Clausewitz's assertion that "War is politics by other means."[232] Similarly, politics is war continued by other means. Politics ends war, and administers relations of force established by war. Peace, then, is not the suspension of disequilibrium. Politics 'reinscribes' these relations of force on language, economics and social institutions, sanctioning disequilibrium through the legitimating

[229] *Ibid*: 119.
[230] *Ibid:* 121.
[231] *Ibid:* 51.
[232] *Ibid:* 90.

discourse of universal law[233]. Modern power is no longer centralized through the sovereign or exclusively through the state but is dispersed through capillary institutions such as schools, the clinic and prisons, as well as the norms established by the biological and human sciences (subconscious drives, for example). Disciplinary mechanisms have been super-imposed over the system of sovereign rights, concealing the actual procedures and domination in the techniques of power. According to Foucault, the theory of sovereignty and its codes are used to legitimate disciplinary constraints and thereby disguise the actual mechanisms of domination.[234]

Foucault's genealogy of sovereign power reveals the inadequacy of a foundational epistemology, such as Taylor's, which allows for universal claims about sovereign rights. If political relations shaping knowledge claims are obscured by the pretension of disinterestedness, the formulation of sovereign rights may serve as a means of domination. However, Foucault's point about the necessary relations of power wound up in knowledge claims is not entirely negative. Although knowledge is necessarily constituted in relations of power, knowledge does not necessarily serve as a means of domination. The positive point is that since discourse transmits power, discourse can also be used to undermine and expose power.

This is where the role of immanent critique comes in. Discourse such as Foucault's reveals inconsistencies in political theory, from a position of immanent critique, to expose the political motives behind universal pretensions. Immanent critique agrees to play the devil's advocate and accept the rules of the object of critique, hypothetically assuming its terms of discourse - to show where it is self-refuting. A similar tactic was employed by Marx, whose immanent critique of capitalism involved accepting the rules of the game laid down by classical political economists to show that – by its own rules – capitalism contradicts itself[235].

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[233] *Ibid: 90-91.*
[234] *Ibid*: 104-106.

With immanent critique, one accepts the presuppositions of the political theory one examines, to show how they are used towards the ends of domination. This is preferable to foundational epistemology, since there can be no disinterested position from which to critique theoretical presuppositions, since all theory entails relations of power. There is no a-political perspective from which to justify sovereign rights, which is why Taylor's epistemic foundationalism is inadequate for the task of disinterestedness to which he wants to put it. In fact, power and discourse are irreducible. Through the selection of useful discourse, interest plays a fundamental role in determining what counts as knowledge and what does not. Thus Foucault offers us a 'cynical' discourse, which does not consider itself a meta-discourse, but acknowledges its own subjective position in historically contingent relations of power.

Foucault's genealogical critique reminds us that the humanist presuppositions of sovereign rights such as Taylor's have played a part in the legitimation of domination under the illusion of pre-constituted freedom, where, in fact, power relations are ongoing. Free trade economic liberalism, for example, has been used to maintain asymmetrical power relations on a global scale, justified in terms of universal interest on an un-level playing field. Foucault's immanent critique of the human sciences unmasks its role in the development of disciplinary technologies that have served to normalise given states of affairs, with asymmetrical relations of power, by citing their universal applicability. Does he thereby discredit his own work?[236]

I wish to argue that Foucault's avoidance of normative, universal commitments, such as Taylor's, allows him to avoid legitimating aspiring contestants in the struggle over what is to count as the truth. If, qua intentionality, every representation of the world is socially mediated and thus contingent on interpretation, then we cannot derive an account of the world beyond politics. Knowledge is the instrument by which we apprehend reality. But if it is an instrument, then we can't help reshaping the object of knowledge. Thus it is

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[235] For example, interest one: pay as little as possible for labour, to extract maximum surplus value. Interest two: sell surplus value to capitalist employees in the form of commodities. But, overall, capitalists' employees are also their market: hence the contradiction.
[236] Grumley, J. 1989: 199.

preferable to assess political discourse in terms of its own underlying assumptions, rather than from an allegedly a-political universal foundation: hence the need for immanent critique, as opposed to foundational epistemology.

Avoiding universal political commitments, however, does not entail relativist subjectivism. As I demonstrated in chapter two, interest is constituted in relations of power. One's interests cannot be made self-present since dialectical intentionality involves a rejection of the metaphysics of presence, ruling out discrete self-present interest. Both Hegel's allegory of master-slave relations, and Sartre's characterisation of sadomasochistic flights from transcendence or facticity demonstrate the ontological impossibility of subjectivism. That knowledge is interested does not mean it is subjective. Autonomy is *constituted* in relations of power; it is not attainable in isolation. That knowledge is interested does not make it subjective, since there is no pre-discursively autonomous individual in the first place. Subjectivism requires one to posit discrete, subjective, not inter-subjective, interests, which the ontology I have argued for avoids.

On the other hand, positing the conditions of justice by means of minimalist assumptions about rational agency and human choice, Taylor's discourse of human rights neglects the historical and political context of rights-claims. As Hegel demonstrated, liberal government is not the product of nature and rational reflection, but a result of historical processes involving struggle[237]. Foucault takes up this perspective to show that the structures of social life are not only constraints on freedom, but also a context for the development of powers and capacities. Autonomy is not some 'natural datum'[238] that we all begin with, nor is rational interest-satisfaction confined to the agency of individuals. Rationality can also be predicated of institutions and political cultures[239]. Political community is in part constitutive of what it means to be human. The accusation of moral subjectivism against Foucault is predicated on the notion of autonomous, rational agency: an a-historical abstraction.

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[237] Smith, S. 1989: ix.
[238] *Ibid:* 3.

By contrast, immanent critique is not derived from the first principles of a foundation of knowledge, but rather seeks "the standards of rationality within existing systems of thought, on their own terms,"[240] proceeding from the world of opinion and not from conditions specified in advance. Thus it is "an historically and hermeneutically sensitive form of cultural criticism."[241] As Hegel put it, "thinking is not simply about the world – it is something that takes place in the world."[242] Hegel teaches us that the interpreter is always situated. Locke's 'state of nature', for example, was used to justify a particular liberal interpretation of universal rights. The 'natural law' of social contract theory is an Enlightenment attempt to make moral judgments natural, citing a pre-political state of nature as the origin of man's rights and obligations[243] thereby allowing for a single moral order based on facts of universal human nature, needs and interests. Immanent critique rejects such universal abstraction, such disinterested pretensions, and instead critiques political theory from within its own theoretical presuppositions.

Experience is necessarily interpreted from an interested perspective. Foundational epistemology tries to judge beliefs by their mapping onto the world. But this requires a further yardstick, independent of politically interested interpretation, by which to measure, which we don't have. Absolving one's claims from interpretation, and pretending universality, obscures the practical function of knowledge in everyday life. Epistemic foundationalism facilitates dogmatism and domination. Resistance is suppressed by the belief that a given system is necessary and impartial. By contrast, the solution of immanent critique to this problem is to engage in an internal examination of knowledge, seeking criteria of validity from within existing forms of knowledge[244]. By acknowledging the political interestedness of knowledge it is better able to reveal the political purposes to which claims of impartiality are put.

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[239] *Ibid*
[240] *Ibid*: 10.
[241] *Ibid*: 10
[242] Hegel, GWF, in Smith, S. 1989: 10.
[243] Smith, S. 1989: 25.
[244] *Ibid*: 173.

The problem with Hegel's method of immanent critique is its seductive teleology. If contradiction is interpreted in Hegel as overcome in synthesis, an a-political position is derived from which to assess historical progress. But if struggle is ongoing, as I believe history necessitates, then this teleological position is external to the process, and provides the very sort of epistemic foundation, which Hegel's historicism rejects. The same problem crops up with Marx. It is all very well exposing contradictions in the economic relations of capital from within, but the universalistic telos of communist utopia is illegitimate except as an ideal. Ideally, conflicts of interest should be overcome, but such a state of affairs is, if history is anything to go by, out of reach. Marx's useful tools of analysis are thereby subject to caricature and colonization[245]. If communism is a-political, allowing for an overcoming of conflicts of interest, then the communist point of view claims universal legitimacy. This pretension once again obscures the power relations entailed in political theory, as with foundational epistemology.

Nevertheless, the Hegelian, and Marxist, notion of immanent critique can be adapted by refusing the notion of synthesis as an overcoming of contradiction, and treating it instead as a perpetual becoming, thereby undermining the epistemic foundations of Absolute Spirit, or communist utopia. These may be ideals, which we might wish to work towards, but one must acknowledge there is no overcoming of the struggles that shape our existence. We kill to eat, fight viruses and struggle against each other. Foucault's genealogies of power take on the fundamental premise of immanent critique. They avoid universal foundations, instead providing instruments of analysis; "to locate lines of weakness, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organization..."[246] Immanent critique refuses absolutes or constants because we are never finished with history.

Philosophy has an important role to play in preventing reason from going beyond the limits of experience. Hence it is important for us to watch over 'the excessive powers of

[245] Foucault, M: *Power/Knowledge*. 1980: 81.
[246] *Ibid*: 62.

political rationality'[247]. It is important to keep an eye on the links between rationalisation and power[248], between power and knowledge, to make facile gestures difficult. One *admits* interest, bias, when addressing political perspectives, to being within the discourse and social practices of history. But immanent critique offers no prognosis, nor prescription. It functions only within the terms of its object. "A society without power relations can only be an abstraction... [thus] it is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power... but of detaching the power of truth from forms of hegemony,"[249] to facilitate resistance. Foucault accepts the goal of emancipation in the political theory he critiques, to question its universal pretensions.

A foundational humanist critique such as Taylor's, of Nazi concentration camps, for example, would appeal to the sovereign right of the individual not to be treated like this. By contrast, immanent critique would appeal not to an outside perspective, but to inconsistencies in Nazi ideology. This may sound ineffectively academic, but the German population in the 1930's was not inherently evil. Somehow Nazi ideology was legitimated through the appeal to something the German people believed in. Germany was a broadly Christian society. Something nasty worked its way between German values and Nazi practice. Immanent critique would involve clearing up exactly what that was, to show how and where good German values were corrupted by Nazi hegemony, thereby de-legitimating Nazism's appeal to such values. Political critique need not appeal to foundational human rights where there are plenty of historically generated values to go round.

By contrast with Taylor's epistemic foundationalism, immanent critique is not the search for universal, necessary, formal structures with universal value, but an investigation into the discursive events that constitute us. The aim is not to identify universal structures of knowledge and moral action, but to treat instances of discourse that articulate what we say, think and do as *historical events*[250]. Critique is not about reflecting on what is true

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[247] Foucault, M. "The Subject and Power" in Dreyfuss & Rabinow. 1982: 210.
[248] *Ibid.*
[249] Foucault, M. in Wisnewski, J. 2000: 430-431.
[250] Foucault, M. "What is Enlightenment?" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*: 315.

and what is false but rather our relationship to truth and the purposes it serves. As Foucault argued, "There is no sovereign philosophy but a philosophy in activity."[251] Some may miss a little monarchy in philosophy, but others realize "that the world is error, that history is filled with people of no consequence, and that it is time for others to keep quiet so that at last the sound of their disapproval may be heard."[252] The power that is determined through systems of truth can be challenged through those very systems. It is imperative to do so.

In an anonymous interview in 1980, Foucault argued:

> The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they must do. By what right would he do so? Remember all the prophesies, promises, injunctions and plans intellectuals have been able to formulate in the course of the last two centuries and of which we have seen the effects. The work of an intellectual is not to mould the political will of others; it is, through the analyses that he does in his own field, to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions... [to] make facile gestures difficult.[253]

Critique is not about replacing one certitude with another, but rather an engagement with theories on their own terms, without the external, universal foundation of epistemic foundationalism such as Taylor's. This part of the chapter defended the claim made by Foucault that knowledge is generated in historically and politically contingent relations of power, which condition the knowing subject, demonstrating epistemological coherence of Foucault's political analysis in terms of immanent critique. Yet the conceptions of sovereign power, pre-political freedom, and universal human rights, which are presupposed in Taylor's objection to Foucault, fail to take this contingency into account. By contrast, immanent critique addresses the historicity of knowledge claims by engaging with the object of critique on its own terms, rather than from a supposedly universal standpoint.

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[251] Foucault, M. "The Masked Philosopher" in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*: 327.
[252] *Ibid.*
[253] Foucault, M. *Foucault Live*: 462.

PART TWO – FOUCAULT'S POSITIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

Having argued that immanent critique is preferable to foundational epistemology, I will now show that Foucault makes constructive epistemological commitments with his power/knowledge thesis, which avoid the a-historicism of foundational epistemology, identified as a problem in the previous section. This runs contrary to Rorty's argument that Foucault makes no epistemological commitments. On the one hand, Taylor rejects Foucault's work as Philosophically incoherent because he says it fails to take a viable epistemological standpoint; on the other, Rorty endorses Foucault as a post-Philosophical theorist because he says he moves beyond epistemology. Against Rorty, I will argue that Foucault makes explicit epistemological commitments, and then go on to show that Foucault's epistemology overcomes the problems I identified with epistemic foundationalism in the previous section. I argue it is essential in political philosophy to reject Taylor's naturalistic epistemology in favour of the historicist epistemology entailed by Foucault's notion of power/knowledge.

This half of the chapter will take the following course, in four sections: First I discuss Rorty's treatment of the history of modern epistemology to explain his distinction between modern epistemological philosophy, the search for universal justifying criteria for knowledge, and post-epistemological philosophy. I then turn to Rorty's discussion of Foucault to show how he aligns Foucault with his own pragmatist, post-epistemological project. In the second section I demonstrate through Foucault's work the extent to which Rorty has got things right – pragmatic utility and Foucault's notion of power are very similar. However, I argue that Foucault's conception of power/knowledge entails a distinct epistemology. In section three I defend Foucault's historicist epistemology against an objection to its reflexive incoherence: Foucault makes *a-historical* stipulations on the nature of knowledge, but his epistemology – a knowledge claim itself – says knowledge is necessarily historical. I will defend Foucault's historicist epistemology by demonstrating both its ontological grounding and the value of such an approach. Lastly, I argue that Foucault's power/knowledge dyad overcomes the problems I will identify with an a-historicist epistemology, using Taylor's naturalist account as an example.

Section One: A Genealogy of Knowledge, the End of Epistemology

This section will explain Rorty's argument that Foucault's philosophy is post-epistemological, to show how much of what Foucault says about power and knowledge appears post-epistemological, contrary to the claim I wish to make that Foucault makes a positive contribution to epistemology that is valuable for political philosophy. First I explain what Rorty means by post-epistemological philosophy, and then go on to show why he thinks Foucault is doing this sort of work.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [*PMN*], Rorty argues that modern epistemology has come to an end at the end of the 20th Century[254]. He explains that modern epistemology was founded on Descartes' notion of the mind as a source of necessary truths, distinct from the contingent empirical domain[255]. The concerns of modern epistemology, he argues, have historically proved misguided. He claims epistemology involves the search for criteria by which to derive apodictic truth – which, once unveiled, compels the mind to believe once unveiled. Rather than aiming to end argument with apodictic truth, Rorty posits knowledge based on dialectically generated pragmatic utility, aimed towards continuing conversation. *PMN* gives us a 'theoretical diagnosis'[256] of modern epistemology to make way for post-epistemological philosophy. Rorty claims knowledge is historically generated for its utility. Furthermore, he bases this claim about knowledge on historically generated evidence for its utility, rather than epistemological argument, or proof. Thus, he argues, he moves beyond epistemology.

Rorty's most sustained historical demonstration of the practical futility of the modern notion of epistemology (a theory of knowledge) as first-philosophy occurs in chapter three of *PMN*. His historical account motivates pragmatism as a more useful successor to epistemology, arguing that it allows us to do more useful philosophical work, by turning

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[254] Rorty, R. 1979 [hereafter PMN]: 136: Rorty claims that knowledge as a problem which needs a theory is the product of the 17th Century attempt to establish philosophy as an autonomous scholastic discipline viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations requiring foundational criteria of justification.
[255] Rorty's 'theoretical diagnosis' seems not dissimilar to Foucault's genealogical method of historicizing the production of true discourses to reveal their flaws.
[256] Williams, M. "Epistemology and the Mirror of Nature" in *Rorty & His Critics*, 2000: 191.

away from the search for foundational certainty: indubitable universal principles which determine all accuracy of representation according to a correspondence notion of truth. By contrast, pragmatism treats knowledge as historically relative and hinged on socially, or 'conversationally' mediated interests[257]. Let us take an overview of Rorty's historical evidence to see what he means by the end of modern epistemology, so that we might evaluate the alignment of Foucault's power/knowledge with Rorty's 'post-epistemological', pragmatist concerns.

Descartes' 'certainty of mind' allows for the formation of modern epistemology – which addresses what we can know and how we might know it better by means of reflection. Its practitioners regard modern epistemology as a foundational science, the basis of all other sciences, formulated with necessary truths arrived at by means of rational reflection on the essence of mind, which is the source of indubitability[258]. Kant argued on the basis of Descartes' dualist metaphysics that, since we constitute ideas, we have *a priori* knowledge of them[259]. If beliefs are based on a) empirical *intuition* (*a posteriori* sense data) mixed with b) the constituting activity of the mind (*a priori* conceptual categories), and we can know how our mind functions, b) then we can unpack beliefs in their constituent parts and thereby determine whether they are justified and true or not. As Rorty argues, however, you cannot discern intuition from conceptualisation, since we have both at the same time. But if knowledge is historically contingent, and we can't discern what we make from what we find, where does this leave modern epistemology's universal, foundational certainties?

Rorty argues that it is with the abandonment of the search for foundational certainty that pragmatism ought to replace modern epistemology[260]. Nietzsche's notion of will to power, Bergson's 'intentionality', Heidegger's rejection of objectivity as a conflation of appearance with reality, and lastly Quine's argument that we can't discern language from

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[257] *PMN*: 386. "We don't need a new epistemology, or ideology, but a blocking of canonical vocabularies with *conversation*." – also *PMN*: 331: "We must abandon the notion of certain values ('rationality', 'disinterestedness') floating free of institutional and educational practices of the day."
[258] *PMN:* 136.
[259] *Ibid*: 137.
[260] Rorty, R. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. 1982 [hereafter CP]: xvii:

experience as the cause of our responses, contribute to the pragmatist rejection of modern epistemology – the search for foundational criteria with which to assess accuracy of representation. The pragmatist, "Drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enables us to cope."[261] Knowledge, for the pragmatist, is interested.

If knowledge is interested, and interest is historically contingent and generated out of conflicting relations of power, there can be no universal necessities in knowledge that are not *a priori* true, i.e. by definition. By contrast with modern epistemology, pragmatism follows the Hegelian line that, "Philosophy is its time grasped in thought."[262] Hence there can be no unified, a-historical, necessary discourse against which all other discourses can be compared. We don't yet have one, and nor do we know how to get one, argues Rorty[263]. We can't step outside our skins to compare ourselves with something Absolute and escape contingency[264]. "Regress of interpretation cannot be cut off by the sort of 'intuition' Cartesian epistemology took for granted."[265] The pragmatic response to such a problem is to move on with something more useful, to abandon the modern tradition of Philosophy as needing a theory of knowledge.[266] Rorty's genealogy of modern epistemology, "The history of attempts to isolate the True," shows, "there is no interesting work to be done in this."[267] Since this argument is historically, and not formally, generated, Rorty claims it is not epistemological.

Having outlined Rorty's pragmatist argument against modern epistemology, I will end this section by examining his alignment of Foucault with the post-epistemological

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[261] *Ibid:* xvii.
[262] *Ibid*: 174. He curiously concludes later this "prevents man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions" (*PMN*: 379) - one comes to expect Rorty to be more cautious about metaphysically oriented words like 'delusion' than he is here.
[263] *PMN:* 348.
[264] *CP*: xix: Language is a tool, 'there is no way to think about our purposes or the world except by using language,' and thus, 'Philosophy, the attempt to say how language relates to the world… is on this view, impossible.'
[265] *Ibid:* xx.
[266] *PMN: 348.* See also *CP*: xiv – x.
[267] *CP*: xiv. A bold claim considering the scale of interests involved.

perspective of pragmatism. Rorty maintains that Foucault's theory of power/knowledge is not an epistemological thesis about the truth. [268] He argues Foucault can be aligned with pragmatism through Nietzsche's contribution to his work. According to Rorty, Foucault, like Nietzsche, is, "Content to take the halo off words like 'truth' and 'science' and 'knowledge' and 'reality', rather than offering a view about the nature of things named by those words."[269] Nietzsche's philosophy shows life without metaphysical comfort, post-God, post-universal foundation, so to speak, and post-epistemology, to use Rorty's term. Rorty argues that Foucault abandons of the hope of *discovering* the truth, rejecting the distinction between making and finding, discovery and creation. Rorty argues Foucault and the pragmatists are, "The true heirs of Nietzsche and James," in their rejection of metaphysics of presence: the rejection, "Of any privileged vocabulary escaping what we read into it [the object]."[270] Let us evaluate this assessment.

Section Two: Foucault's Epistemology

This section begins with a discussion of Foucault, which lends weight to Rorty's claim that Foucault rejects modern epistemology. I then look at Baudrillard's claim that power functions as an epistemological principle in Foucault's work, to suggest that, whilst Foucault's work is post-epistemological in Rorty's sense, it nevertheless entails an alternative epistemology to the modern tradition Rorty discusses in *PMN*. I use Baudrillard's claim that power functions as a final principle of explanation for Foucault to show that, contrary to Rorty, there is epistemological commitment entailed by his theory of power/knowledge.

In "Truth and Juridical Forms"[271] Foucault objects to Kantian/Cartesian epistemology, which distinguishes between experience and conceptualisation. For Foucault, there is no pre-defined distinction between making and finding – rational conceptualisation and sense perception - to be isolated. By implication, by Rorty's criteria, Foucault thereby

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[268] *CP:* 152.
[269] *Ibid:* 150.
[270] *Ibid:* 152.
[271] Foucault, M. *The essential works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984.* Vol . "Power" *1997-2000*: 3.

rejects any epistemological foundation: knowledge is historically generated in relations of power, which rules out foundational criteria of justification.

Foucault claims that Nietzsche's is the best model for a method to historically analyse knowledge. This is because, as early as 1873, Nietzsche declared knowledge an invention of man.[272] Conceptual criteria are not inscribed in human nature as an irreducible essence, as Kant supposed. Knowledge, Nietzsche realized, and Foucault agrees, is made, not found. Since representations are made, they do not correspond objectively to that which they represent[273]. Interest rules out correspondence with 'nature'. Foucault makes this point, citing Nietzsche:

> Let us guard against saying there are laws in nature... There can be no relation of natural continuity between knowledge and the things that knowledge must know... Knowledge can only be a violation of the things known, and not a perception, recognition, identification with those things.[274]

The above discussion of Foucault reveals the resemblance between his and Rorty's positions. Rorty rejects the Cartesian notion of our having a 'glassy essence', allowing us to mirror nature with our knowledge; Foucault rejects the transcendent subject, used to ground Cartesian epistemology, somehow essentially distinct from experience, and consequently the distinction "between knowledge and things [known]"[275] Thus, like Rorty, Foucault rejects *a priori* criteria of knowledge of modern epistemology. Consistent with Rorty's characterisation of him, Foucault argues knowledge is *an activity*, a tool; not a universal structure, but an activity, which takes place in ongoing 'strategic, perspectival, relations' of struggle.

Knowledge, for Foucault, is historically generated in relations of power, in relation to interests, as a tool (utility), which is why the Cartesian/Kantian approach to epistemology, as based on foundational, universal certainties, is flawed. It is no surprise

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[272] *Ibid:* 7.
[273] *Ibid*: 9. Note the parallels with Rorty.
[274] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science:* 109.
[275] Foucault, M. *The essential works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984.* Vol . "Power" *1997-2000*: 9. i.e. he rejects the conception of knowledge as accuracy of representation

then that Rorty endorses Foucault[276]. This has been the easy part. The difficulty is to show that Foucault makes positive epistemological commitments, which contradicts Rorty's claims. I now turn to Baudrillard, who claims that power functions as a final principle of explanation in Foucault's work, to show how, despite these supposedly post-epistemological claims, Foucault makes epistemological commitments with his theory of power/knowledge.

Against, "The search for some final vocabulary, which can somehow be known in advance to be the common core, the truth of all the other vocabularies which might be advanced in its place,"[277] Rorty makes the argument he sees as Foucault's: "There is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we've not created in the course of creating a practice."[278] By contrast, Baudrillard criticises Foucault, arguing that power functions as a final principle of explanation, an epistemological premise, in his work:

> Even if it has no finality and no last judgment, power returns to its own identity again as a *final principle*: it is the last term, the irreducible web, the last tale that can be told; it is what structures the indeterminate equation of the word... What Foucault does not see is that 'power' [as a final principle of explanation]... is only a simulation of perspective – it is no more reality than economic accumulation – and what a tremendous trap that is... Something at the bottom of the whole system *resists the infinite expansion of production* – otherwise, we would all be already buried.[279]

Baudrillard's point is that power functions as the very sort of last principle Foucault had rejected in the humanist theory of the subject. What shows us that knowledge is interested? Power. The interestedness of knowledge proves that knowledge is interested. The circular logic reveals Foucault's epistemological base camp. The point at which a theorist ceases to provide the skeptic with further justification reveals her epistemological foundation.

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[276] Interestingly, Rorty shows that Nietzsche's work mirrored that of James, and Husserl mirrored Russell, historically. In the late 70's Analytic and Continental philosophy once again match up two philosophers, Rorty and Foucault, working independently, in distinct philosophical traditions, in parallel. In fact, Rorty's dismissal of commensurability between 'vocabularies' (e.g. epistemology/pragmatism) appears unwound by his own brilliant performance as he threads together the vocabularies of analytic, continental, Ancient and Modern Philosophy in his easy-going, down-to-earth narrative style.
[277] *CP*: 152
[278] *ibid*
[279] Baudrillard, J. 1987: 40-41.

Baudrillard argues that power is a final principle, a base epistemological premise in Foucault's work, while Rorty argues Foucault rejects final principles, making him post-Philosophical. What if Rorty is right and Foucault knows power/knowledge is just another vocabulary, as historical as any other, made not found, yet Baudrillard is right that he uses this as his final vocabulary? Foucault uses power as a basic epistemic principle yet acknowledges its historicity. In the section following, I will argue for the philosophical coherence of this epistemological position, by grounding it in terms of the ontology I set up in the first two chapters.

The truth about knowledge, Foucault, at the end of skeptical interrogation, would be forced to admit, is that it is interested. But Foucault claims there is no absolute value to rationality in the very same space where he claims rationality is instrumentality[280]. This is not a flat-out contradiction: instrumentality dislocates any absolute value attached to rationality; but rationality remains tied to something absolute: instrumentality. Instrumentality does not dictate purpose, but it nevertheless partly dictates what knowledge entails. We should not be surprised by Foucault's admission in the late 1970's:

> The problem of the truth of what I say is a difficult one for me; in fact it's the central problem. That's the question I still haven't answered.[281]

Though Rorty makes a convincing case that Foucault rejects epistemology, we find Foucault uncertain as to what he's done in this regard, and Baudrillard convinced that, in his rejection of humanism, Foucault simply replaces man with power[282] as a source of a-historical epistemological foundation, making a universal epistemological claim with his theory of power/knowledge. His fundamental premise that 'knowledge is interested' (i.e. generated out of historical relations of power) - his final word on the matter - with no further justification than a circular argument, arrives at an epistemological base camp.

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[280] Foucault, M. *The essential works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984.* Vol . "Power" *1997-2000*: 229.
[281] *Ibid:* 241.
[282] a similar move to the one I showed earlier in this thesis with Foucault's post-Archaeological admission about the trap of treating structuralist discourse as a theoretical *a priori*

The previous half of this chapter restricted its analysis to Foucault's 'immanent' critique. Yet it appears there may be a positive epistemological standpoint in his method after all. Against modern epistemology, which claims knowledge is distinct from the contingent empirical domain, Foucault posits an historicist epistemology. This historicism need not undermine the epistemological status of Foucault's power/knowledge dyad. In the following section I will defend this historicist epistemology ontologically.

Section Three: Historicist Epistemology

This section makes use of the ontological work done in chapters one and two to demonstrate the necessity of choice in belief, as well as the value of recognising this. Foucault's epistemology casts suspicion on the 'disinterested' claims he debunks through his genealogical analysis. However, his historicism about knowledge may be thrown reflexively back as a criticism of his own knowledge claims[283]: The *a priori* stipulation of his 'power/knowledge' thesis arises from a historically contingent context, so how can it put forward a necessary stipulation on the nature of knowledge? I argue that the ongoing power relations I demonstrated in the previous two chapters show that knowledge is necessarily interested, and that it is bad faith to think otherwise. In fact, as the final section of this chapter will show, in view of Foucault's historicist epistemology, a-historicist epistemology proves untenable. Foucault's historicism overcomes the flaws with foundational, naturalistic[284] epistemology such as Taylor's, for political theory.

I first draw out the epistemological premises entailed by Foucault's discussion of knowledge in "Questions of Method." Secondly, I explain the reflexive objection against historicist epistemology. I then defend both the necessity and value of Foucault's historicist epistemology by demonstrating its ontological grounding in terms of existential phenomenology, with which Foucault's historicism is consistent. Let us begin with Foucault's epistemology, which I will thereafter summarise in a list.

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[283] Rorty, as we saw in section one, claims that pragmatism is post-epistemological. For him, historicism and epistemology are inconsistent.

[284] By naturalistic, I mean an epistemology, which allows us to make claims about natural facts, as if claims can be made, unmediated by political relations.

Foucault claims rationality is an instrument [1]. Since what is rational to believe is historically contingent,[285] knowledge is historically relative to human purposes [2]. Hence there is no a-historical absolute against which knowledge may be assessed[286][3]. With the epistemological premises above, Foucault does not believe he has grasped any final truths about knowledge and power. Nevertheless, he argues, his books have had real consequences when people related them to their experiences. This effect, he argues, is not a matter of truth or falsity, but is nevertheless a real effect of his readers' relation to historical facts. Discourse involves an *interaction* between the knower and what she knows[287]. By knowing it, the knower changes that which she knows about, and is at the same time changed by that which she comes to know.[288]. "The subject, in inquiry, is modified by that inquiry."[289] [4]. As far as the truth of Foucault's own discourse is concerned, "I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them. Everything I do is with the conviction that it may be of use."[290] Foucault uses power/knowledge as a stipulation in his discourse, in order to facilitate political change [5].

From the above discussion we derive the following epistemic principles from Foucault:

1) Knowledge is interested.
2) Since purposes change, knowledge is historically contingent.
3) Since knowledge is interested and historically contingent, there is no a-historical absolute against which knowledge may be assessed.
4) Knowledge involves an ongoing interaction between the knower and what she knows.
5) Knowledge, including epistemology, is developed for its usefulness, not its final truth-value.

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[285] *Ibid.* These statements are drawn for the most part from an interview entitled "Questions of Method".
[286] *Ibid:* 229.
[287] *Ibid:* 253.
[288] *Ibid* – knowing is an act, knowledge a tool. Thus: 'discourse/practice'
[289] *Ibid:* 254. as is the object of inquiry, modified by inquiry
[290] *Ibid:* 294.

I will now consider the historicism in the above epistemology to explain a potential objection to Foucault's approach. Epistemology itself entails knowledge claims about knowledge, revealing a sceptical dilemma. Modern epistemology, in Rorty's terms, attempts to solve this problem by finding a set of universal, *a priori* criteria, against which knowledge claims may be assessed for their justification. Foucault's epistemology on the other hand makes explicit its own historical contingency. By what rights, then, might it claim to be the last word on a necessary condition of knowledge? In point (3) we see, "there is no a-historical absolute against which knowledge may be assessed." Is 'interest' not such an absolute in 'power/knowledge'?

To assume that knowledge is interested entails an awareness of the existential insight into belief – our beliefs attain significance in light of our chosen projects, as I will now show with a recapitulation of the ontology developed in chapters one and two. Foucault emphasises that knowledge and beliefs are partly conditioned in a social context of relations of power. This historicism is consistent with Sartre's existentialist rejection of the distinction between facts and values. To defend Foucault's epistemology against the reflexive objection I have just discussed, I now return to the groundwork done in chapters one and two.

The ontology I excavated from the battleground between Foucault and Sartre in the first two chapters of this thesis necessarily implicates interest – through dialectical intentionality – in the subject's relations with the world and others. Social relations were shown to involve conflict of interests in both Foucault and Sartre's understandings of power and freedom respectively. Sartre's notion that we are a lack projecting possibilities into the world through our future-directed orientation entails that all so-called 'facts' (objective truth) about the world are affected by our desires. The existential phenomenological insight that our human essence is to have no essence goes all the way down: if we have no essence, there is no essence to anything in our world[291] (our world passes through us as our knowledge of it entails). Our desires and projects entwine values

[291] *PMN:* 361.

with facts. As a consequence of intentionality, Sartre rejects the distinction between facts and values.

Rorty interprets Sartre as dismissing the search for 'objective truth'[292] as tantamount to bad faith: avoiding the responsibility for choosing one's own project[293]. Take Foucault's attitude to homosexuality as an example of what it would be not to act in bad faith regarding one's sexuality. Foucault insisted he had chosen to engage in homosexual activity[294]. Many gay rights activists insist that society accepts homosexuals since they are born gay. It would be as unfair, then, to discriminate against homosexuality as it is to discriminate against blacks. This, in Sartrean terms, is bad faith. Blaming a gay gene avoids the responsibility of affirming one's chosen lifestyle; looking for a gay gene as a natural fact, to justify sexuality you would otherwise find problematic is a flight from transcendence. Belief is something we must take part in making, thus it is bad faith to look for apodictic truth, which speaks for itself. In Sartre's Philosophy, the search for objectivity as one right way is the search for yet another thing to push us about like matter so we can evade the responsibility of choice.

From existential ontology, we derive the insight that there are no value-free facts. The search for apodictic truth, objective foundations in epistemology, is thus in bad faith. It involves hiding from the responsibility to evaluate, to take a stance with belief. Thus, if knowledge entails belief, existential phenomenological ontology reveals that knowledge entails evaluation[295]. To hide from this is bad faith. Splitting ourselves into a) knowers of truths, and b) ethical/aesthetic creatures, is a disaster[296].

That knowledge stands relative to interests has been emphasised since Hegel, who historicized ontology. Historical conditions, of conflicting social relations, do not rule out knowledge. Rather, they help define it, undoing the neat distinction between facts and

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[292] in this context: accurate representations undisturbed by the bias of interestedness
[293] *PMN*: 361.
[294] Duncker, P. 1996: 38.
[295] It is the same with Kierkegaard: the necessary responsibility of choice in belief is illustrated by the anguish of Abraham, who was faced with the burden of God's command: "Kill your son." Was it God? Had Abraham interpreted His message correctly? Would he obey? Choice is endemic.

values. I have used phenomenological ontology to defend Foucault's presupposition that knowledge is interested, yet this is still not a last word to the skeptic. What justifies the presupposition of ontological intentionality, one might ask? Ultimately, phenomenological ontology can do no more than appeal to experience. On the basis of this, if we are necessarily free, which it appears we are, knowledge is necessarily interested.

Having argued for the value and necessity of treating knowledge as conditioned by the historical and political contingency of socially mediated interests, I will end this chapter by demonstrating how such an approach overcomes the deficiencies of an a-historicist account of knowledge, using Taylor's as an example of the latter.

Section Four: The 'End' of Knowledge

> A phrase by Marx is pertinent here: man produces man. How should it be understood? In my judgment what ought to be produced is not man as nature supposedly intended him, or as his essence is ordained to be. We need to produce something that doesn't yet exist, without being able to know what it will be.[297]

Taylor's biological foundationalism serves as a good example of foundational epistemology at work, making clear the reasons why one might wish to refute Foucault's account of power/knowledge. I have demonstrated, however, that such an approach is ontologically untenable, which I shall make clear in this final section. If one necessarily defines one's subjectivity in one's interested relations with the world and others, and all knowledge is mediated through human subjects, then all that is known is conditioned by intentions. Having argued for the necessary choice entailed by knowledge, in this final section I will show how Foucault's account of power/knowledge overcomes the problem of a-historicism in political philosophy, using Taylor's naturalist account as an example.

In the previous part of this chapter, concerning immanent political critique, my discussion of Taylor's objection referred to his sovereign conception of human rights. Against the

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[296] *PMN:* 364.
[297] *Ibid:* 275.

historical relativism of truth regimes, Taylor argued that torture is always wrong because of its effect on the natural human body. Thus, for Taylor, natural facts about the human body serve an a-historical, a-political basis for the critique of domination[298]. Natural facts about the body are apodictic. Regardless of one's social or historical context, we all feed and we all bleed, for example. Anyone can see this. The body speaks clearly through the political dissonance of discursive interpretation. This is biological truth: there are fundamental human interests, shared by all. Thus universal human rights can be predicated for all individuals. According to Taylor, relations of power do not always dominate knowledge. Natural facts about the body are an example of knowledge untainted by political bias, and it is through such natural facts that universal human rights can serve a basis for political critique from a guaranteed position of neutrality.

Against Foucault's anti-foundationalism, Taylor argues that there *is* an external, overall picture of reality we can discern, dictated to us by biological realities. That rights are subject to constant revisionary strife does not mean we should take a skeptical position and simply repudiate these concerns. Torture, though it was accepted in medieval times, was practiced on basically the same type of body we have today and we can thus discern the reality of its harmfulness. This is a basic humanist premise. We are all humans, so we share basic interests from which universal principles of equality may be derived. That we reject torture today is an *advance* in human culture, argues Taylor, since it has always been wrong to treat the human body in such a way. By means of natural facts about the body, different cultures are not incommensurable. By contrast, Taylor argues, Foucault ties up monolithic, hermetically sealed truth-regimes as incommensurable and thus, his critique does not make sense.[299] In effect, Taylor demands a foundational epistemology from Foucault.

A foundational epistemology like Taylor's assumes natural facts can give us a foundation from which to discern truth from bias. However, to use the terms discussed in the previous section, this is to hide the choices entailed by beliefs in self-deceptive bad faith.

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[298] Taylor, C. "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in ed. Couzens-Hoy, D *The Foucault Reader:* 97.
[299] *Ibid.*

To take recourse to a foundational epistemology that justifies truth claims according to natural facts is to turn from the necessary responsibility we have to bring beliefs into being through our evaluation, by tying them into the projects we value. To cite natural facts, as the sole justification for our beliefs, is to hide what we do from ourselves. Nazis deferred responsibility for their behaviour by citing natural facts about Jews, under the pretence of scientific disinterestedness, to justify their actions. Race was long considered a natural fact, but there is no significance to skin colour or facial characteristics that is not chosen, a product of evaluation.

Discipline & Punish shows that even the significance of torture and execution is historically and politically contingent, despite "natural facts" about the human body, commensurable across historical epochs. If there is a way of preventing the death of thousands of innocent people by torturing one brutal, vindictive criminal, then "natural facts about the human body come to take on a very different significance. Natural facts serve no purpose without evaluation. Even the meaning of death is up for grabs, as relatives of a coma patient might testify. Against foundational epistemology, Foucault denies natural facts, used to justify universal principles, thereby deferring the ongoing responsibility of evaluating knowledge claims, which are mediated by historically and politically mediated interests.

Let us consider Foucault's treatment of sex, to draw out his theoretical position on natural facts, as a counter-example to Taylor. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* does not deny the materiality of the body, but is radically anti-essentialist. As Alan Megill puts it, in *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault's history of sexual liberation and repression, for example, "Foucault is articulating an anti-naturalism." For all his references to the body, he is trying to "demolish any connection between sex (or sexuality) and a presumed natural substratum. He is trying to rid us of the idea of nature as norms."[300] We ought not to conceive of sexuality "as a kind of natural given that power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover."[301] As far as natural

[300] Megill, A: *Prophets of Ambiguity*. 1985: 253.
[301] Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*. 1978: 139-140.

facts are concerned, Foucault sees nature as a human invention, used to impose political constraint. Foucault "finds no bench underneath the paving stones, no 'natural' order at all. There is only the certainty of successive regimes of power."[302]

Sex, Foucault demonstrates, is constructed, not entirely natural. It is not the natural origin of desires but rather mediated as a cultural construct with the aim of social regulation[303]. Power does not try to dominate sexuality but rather employs it as a biological means of legitimation. For example it is not a natural fact that men are cheaters because they need to spread their seed, nor that women are natural cheaters because they seek the strongest genes for their children. To cite a natural fact as justification for one's behaviour involves a deferral of responsibility for evaluating the significance of natural facts. At what point, we must ask, does interpretation not step into the biological picture? In fact gender is an apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established, the means by which 'natural' sex is produced and established as pre-discursive, i.e. prior to the historically and politically contingent interpretation.

> The biological and historical are not consecutive to one another but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance with the development of modern technologies of power that take life as their objective.[304]

A foundational epistemology such as Taylor's involves the idea that certain ways of treating people are absolutely and naturally wrong, regardless of political context, or historical precedent because of universal, natural facts about the human body. By contrast, historicist epistemology rejects such a-historical claims on the basis of the fact that historically and politically mediated inter-subjective interests affect the way we interpret "natural facts", as I have demonstrated in this thesis.

The wider point Foucault makes with his genealogy of sexuality is that it is impossible to know the materiality of the body outside of its cultural significations.[305] Since all our experience of the world is interpreted according to particular interests in particular historical situations, we can derive no a-historical, a-political account of universal human

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[302] Megill, A. 1985: 254.
[303] McNay, L. 1994: 30.
[304] Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality Vol. I.* 1978: 153.

interests, or disinterested knowledge. We can make no disinterested claims about human rights or natural facts about the body. Objects don't just give us knowledge, argues Foucault. Knowledge grows out of our interests. Power/knowledge is what knowledge is. Knowledge is thus historically and politically contingent. Yet the very claim, 'knowledge is interested,' entails an a-historical stipulation on knowledge. If knowledge is biased, does this undermine Foucault's claims about what knowledge is?

Historicist epistemology, which posits knowledge as conditioned by social and political interests, is justified on historical lines by the observation that knowledge claims have historically been conditioned by human purposes. The ontology developed in this thesis has been consistently justified with recourse to phenomenological observation. Phenomenology involves justifying premises according to experience, which is historically generated, rather than from preconceived notions about what experience entails.

Power is a metaphysical signifier in Foucault's later work, his most basic epistemological criterion. Foucault's historicist epistemology, as opposed to foundational epistemology, such as Taylor's, is explicit about its purpose to question universal discourses. It is both ontologically grounded in observation and explicit about the interests it is intended to serve. By contrast, foundational epistemology posits a-historical claims outside of interpretation, 'inferring' them from 'natural facts' about the body, for example. This is bad faith, since knowledge is not determined by natural facts but evaluative. Beliefs are chosen in relation to interests. By contrast with foundational epistemology, historicist epistemology calls for ongoing evaluation, claiming knowledge is directed towards ends, as an activity, a means. In contrast to Rorty's claims about the end of epistemology, Foucault's epistemology overcomes a-historicism, making explicit epistemological commitments, which nonetheless take into account political and historical contingency, which I have argued is essential for political philosophy. In answer to Taylor's objection, knowledge is never final. Nature tells us nothing we do not interpret. It is bad faith to hide from the responsibility of ongoing evaluation this entails.

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[305] McNay, L. 1994: 30.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have argued that political philosophy needs to take into account the historical and political contingency of subjectivity and discourse. Against the universalistic foundations of liberal political philosophy, which rely on a model of the self-interested rational individual and her sovereign rights, I maintain, along with Foucault, that such a model abstracts from the political constitution of identity. Focusing on the disagreement between Foucault and Sartre, I established an ontological basis for the refutation of epistemic foundationalism, arguing that the subject cannot be abstracted from her social, historical and political context, and that knowledge is necessarily constituted in relation to power, in light of chosen interests, and therefore evaluative.

Using Foucault's conceptions of power and knowledge, and Sartre's ontology, I showed how our interests change our experience of the world around us and ourselves, from the basic level of perception in intentionality through to complex social interactions in which our interests are mediated. In the first chapter I explained Foucault's conception of subjectivity by contrasting it against Sartre's understanding of transcendent freedom to show how, Foucault came to theorise inter-subjective power relations. In the second chapter I explained relations of power in terms of dialectical negation, arguing that relations with others involve conflicts of interest, which are constitutive of one's identity, yet this need not rule out freedom. The ontology I developed showed that freedom is both the product of, and impetus for, relations of power. Since our responses to our environment are not determined, subjectivity is both historically and politically contingent. In the final chapter I drew on the methodology and ontology developed in the first two chapters to argue that political philosophy needs to take into account historical contingency, both in critique, and in the development of political theory, such as social contract theory. Using Foucault's conception of power/knowledge, I showed that historicist epistemology is better suited to this task than foundational epistemology. Foucault's work overcomes the flaw of foundational epistemology in political philosophy, which treats true discourse as universal and disinterested.

This thesis then, aims to dialectically mediate the apparently antithetical views on the subject and its formation in society in the writings of Foucault and Sartre. By reading Foucault and Sartre dialectically, I have hoped to revealed the extent to which their individual formulations on the subject are inextricably linked, thereby re-evaluating the distinction many have made between the apparently humanist philosophy of Sartre and the anti-humanist philosophy of Foucault. In doing so I hope to have to refuted the mainly positivistic and humanist schools of thought that lay claim to universal and foundationalist notions, by demonstrating the extent to which their apparent misgivings are informed by and founded upon an unjustified a-historicism. This is not to say that the humanist project is not worthwhile, but that one should take into account the extent to which the subject and history are in constant flux and change within which an end to historical and political contingency is impossible. Against Rorty's claim that this means the end of epistemology, I have shown that epistemology such as Foucault's is able to address such contingency, positing knowledge as end-directed.

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