

The two faces of Michel Foucault

What, do you think that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing...if I were not preparing – with a somewhat shaky hand – a labyrinth into which I can venture...in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same.

Michel Foucault, 1972. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 17

Our attention tends to be arrested by the activities of faces that come and go, emerge and disappear.

Michel Foucault, 1980. 'The Masked Philosopher': 321

Foucault's labyrinth

In an after-dinner speech to a meeting of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, published as *Waiting for Foucault* (1993), Marshall Sahlins remarked on the strangeness of taking utterly seriously one particular set of texts written by Michel Foucault, the 'man of a thousand faces' (1993: 40). This was in 1993, and the set of texts in question were those concerned with power (for instance, going by Sahlins' brief summaries: Abu-Lughod 1990; Jacquemet 1992; Limón 1989). Sahlins' speech neatly skewered an attitude in anthropology of the period he summed up as 'Power, power everywhere, and nothing else to think' (1993: 20), listing just a few of the phenomena (nicknames in Naples and scatological horse-play amongst Mexican-American working-class men, for example) that ethnographers had explained as instances of 'power' or 'resistance'.

Two and a half decades later, we have something else to think: ethics. The anthropology of ethics has furnished the discipline with new terminology, new objects, and arguably with a new way of understanding its own purpose, as this volume describes. It has moved, in some respects, from a notion of 'subject' as in 'one subject to power', to a 'subject' tied to his or her own practical experience and self-knowledge (Foucault 1982a: 781); from 'technologies of domination' to 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1982b: 19); and from a search for the strategies and mechanisms of power to one for 'practices of freedom' (Foucault 1984a: 3). Yet these transformations also originate, at least in part, in Foucault's labyrinth. What, then, is the relationship between these two faces of Foucault, both of which have had such a significant impact on anthropology and beyond?

This chapter will aim to describe some of the content of Foucault's work on ethics and its impact on anthropology. But the question of how that work relates to his earlier, and equally influential, work on power is more than a footnote in intellectual history, let alone in the biography of a particular thinker. One can ask it in those forms, but its relevance to understanding the anthropology of ethics and its relationship to the discipline as a whole lies also in the fact that the question scales up: debates about the relative importance of different parts of Foucault's oeuvre (see e.g. Allen 2000; Burkitt 2002; Flynn 1985; Harrer 2005; Hofmeyr 2006; Menke 2003; Paras 2006) replicate debates about the relative importance of politics and ethics in late-twentieth century philosophy more generally (see the case made in Bourg 2007; and Rancière 2006), which in turn replicate debates about the proper focus of social and cultural anthropology (for instance, Laidlaw 2002; 2013; Kapferer & Gold 2018).

As a consequence, the main body of the chapter will summarise some important aspects of Foucault's intellectual biography, before moving to discuss some debates surrounding how to interpret the legacy of his work, in anthropology and beyond. I will not attempt to resolve the question of how his two 'faces' relate, in part because I will argue that

there may be a lesson to be learnt from Foucault's own apparent unwillingness to resolve this question.

A passion for system

Before his turn to ethics, Foucault's work was united by what some (e.g. Habermas 1987; Honneth 1991; Taylor 1984) have read as a fundamental rejection of the centrality of the subject in philosophical thought. His early works – *Madness and Civilisation* (in English, 1964 – based on the longer *Folie et Dérison*, 1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) – were heavily influenced by the vogue for structuralism then sweeping French intellectual life. In this period Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Althusser were replacing Sartre and Camus as the dominant figures in philosophical circles, and a formalist concern for language and the internal relationships between its component parts seemed poised to triumph over existentialism and earlier incarnations of Marxism, together with their interests in man and history. *The Order of Things* in particular caused some sensation, claiming as it did that 'Man' was an invention of the modern discursive formation, a product of the end of the eighteenth-century, the development of the 'human sciences', and the problem of how to classify into 'the order of things' the subject of classification himself (points further developed anthropologically in Rabinow 1989). Even more radically, Foucault concluded the book with the wager that soon 'Man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea' (1970: 422).

This period of his work was dominated by a method he called 'archaeological', and set out at some length in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The basic thrust of this procedure is the premise that discursive formations or systems of thought – as they were described in the title he chose for his chair at the Collège de France – are underwritten by a set of rules or regulative principles that determine their conceptual possibilities and can be excavated, and their contingency thus grasped. These rules are structural principles, and have nothing to do with individuals, their intentions, or the meanings they seek to convey, and in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* they appear not even to be linked to particular political and economic situations. On the subject of morality Foucault is almost entirely silent at this time, with the exception of claiming, in *The Order of Things*, that 'no morality is possible' for modernity (1970: 357).

However, as early as his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France, delivered in 1970 and subsequently published as 'The Order of Discourse', there were signs that he was beginning to shift his focus away from purely epistemic considerations, and towards politics. He outlined his intent to direct a course on 'the will to know', introduced the concept of 'genealogy', and attributed far more importance to non-discursive influences on systems of thought than he had done previously (1971; see also Paras 2006: 54-57). This first 'turn' is definitively visible in the essay 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history' (1978a), which Dreyfus and Rabinow argue demonstrates the enormous impact that Nietzsche's understanding of power as a productive force in history had on him (1983). His friend and colleague Gilles Deleuze's book *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), co-authored with Félix Guattari, with its vision of power as a dispersed arrangement of connected 'machines' was also an influence (see e.g. Paras 2006: 64-67; Erison 1989: 408-409).

Perhaps more fundamentally, changes in the climate of French intellectual life, as well as in Foucault's own personal experiences, meant that a turn to 'power' must have seemed like a natural transition, rather than the 'break' it has appeared to some in retrospect. May 1968 and its afterlife jolted Foucault and a number of others out of the fascination with structuralism, and he participated in some of the 1969 protests at Vincennes, even sharing a

stage with Sartre, his erstwhile opponent (Eribon 1989: 375). In 1971, together with his partner Daniel Defert, he formed the Group for Information on Prisons, and it is in relation to penal institutions that his sustained interest in power developed, though ‘power’ and ‘politics’ do appear in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as qualifiers of the struggle over discourse (1972: 120). Coupled with knowledge, the subject of his earlier work, and developed over the course of several lecture series at the Collège de France and two books, *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), it would become a concept that would have a revolutionary effect on anthropology and the humanities and social sciences more broadly.

The most obvious explanatory contrast to draw is with Marxism, though Foucault himself also contrasted his concept of power with Freudian psychoanalysis and other such ‘juridical’ models. One of Foucault’s teachers at the École Normale Supérieure had been Louis Althusser, a structural Marxist who had influenced Foucault’s early anti-humanism. His essay on ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1971), written at precisely the time at which Foucault was beginning to think about power, neatly illustrates the tipping point between Marx and Foucault.

Orthodox Marxist accounts of the functioning of power, in addition to describing the ways in which the bourgeoisie might use overt force and violence in order to retain control of the means of production, would often also refer to the notion of ‘ideology’. By this they usually intended an untrue or misleading set of ideas imposed upon people to sustain their ‘false consciousness’. Althusser refers to the distinction between force and ideology as being between ‘Repressive State Apparatuses’ and ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’, but his real focus is the latter. He has two theses on ideology: the first ‘(‘Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’) is a fairly straightforward rendering of ideology as a misleading, ‘unreal’, ‘imaginary’ depiction of actual conditions, opposable to ‘science’. The second, though, brings us almost to Foucault’s revolution: ‘Ideology has a material existence’. By this he roughly intends a sort of political version of Pascal’s gambit: ideology is what we believe, but what we believe is really made manifest (and ‘real’) by what we do (1971). We are what we do, and we do what we are told.

The two theses are also obviously contradictory (how can ‘ideology’ be both ‘material’ and ‘imaginary’?) and the claim that ‘ideology has a material existence’ is on the face of it oxymoronic. There is little direct evidence to suggest that Foucault was influenced by Althusser’s argument (though see Montag 1995). But that second thesis on the material existence of certain sorts of knowledge, divorced from the first, and shorn of abiding reliance on a ‘truth’ in opposition to ideology and on the state as the main fount of authority, comes very close to summing up Foucault’s position: ‘power’ (or at least modern, ‘disciplinary power’) does not operate upon subjects from the outside, constraining them to do or to think things that are against their nature. Power is exactly what makes a subject into a subject (hence his evolving use of the term ‘subjectivation’, or ‘*assujettissement*’, see below). There is no ‘free’ remainder of the subject left over to act against it, and it does not mask a real ‘truth’ beneath its operation. In fact, often it works most effectively in the form of scientific knowledge, or a politics of liberation. Moreover, it does not emanate from a central authority, like a state or a sovereign, in opposition to individuals, but is ‘capillary’, developing and abiding in the micro-contexts of everyday life.

Foucault illustrates these ideas in his examinations of the penal system. *Discipline and Punish* famously begins with a gruesome description of the execution of an attempted regicide. Juxtaposed to this drama is the precisely timetabled set of activities of a reformatory eighty years later, in which time is allotted for work, education, hygiene, food, and prayers. The difference between the two is striking, and the temptation is obviously to read the first as a barbarous act of cruelty, and see the second as the consequence of the dawning of a more

enlightened and humanitarian age. Foucault's point instead is that they exemplify two different styles of power: the first is spectacular and discontinuous, and its purpose is to restore a political order put out of joint by doing public violence to the body of the violator. The second, on the other hand, is uninterrupted and ubiquitous, and it operates not on the body but on the soul by exhaustively organising, distributing, and surveilling subjects (1977a: 3-11). Bentham's panopticon is the epitome of this second form of power in the context of the carceral system, a central observation tower from which all cells could be observed, but the interior of which was invisible to the cells themselves. Unable to be sure of whether or not they were being observed at any given moment, prisoners would effectively govern their own behaviour in the panopticon, without the need for any form of external intervention. They would police themselves.

In the spectacular, sovereign form of power the only relevant 'knowledge' or 'truth' is of the culpability of the criminal. In the second, the whole being of the criminal and the criminal act is produced, made visible, and interrogated. Just as Foucault had already described in the case of the birth of 'man' through the human sciences, this form of power creates subjects (the criminal, the lunatic, the pervert), rather than simply operating on them post-hoc. Althusser's claim that ideology has a material existence is here taken to its logical conclusion, and the influence of Nietzsche's pragmatism is clearly evident: knowledge is power because its product is real, material truth.

This historical shift was not set in motion by any particular individual or group, and disciplinary power is not at the service of any specific section of society. It emerges piecemeal and in haphazard fashion, crystallising in institutions such as prisons, asylums, and clinics, and through the practices and techniques of those at the heart of such institutions, as well as in the human sciences of which Foucault had already written. But for Foucault this transformation is definitive of modernity more broadly, and his first volume of *The History of Sexuality* would set out this theoretical vision at its clearest. It further extended the analysis to cover ways in which this form of productive power was employed in the government not just of individuals but of whole populations, a phenomenon he called 'bio-power'. Sexuality sits precisely at the intersection of these two forms of modern power, and both Foucault and his successors would go on to make productive use of these insights in studies of the 'governmentality' of welfare, colonial, and neoliberal states (see in particular Burchell, Gordon, & Miller 1991; and the review of this literature in Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde 2006).

Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* has been called the 'bible' of modern queer activist movements (Halperin 1995) because of its central thesis that sexuality – indeed, sex itself – is nothing more than a 'fictitious unity' (Foucault 1978b: 154), a nexus for the medical, legal, therapeutic, and punitive interrogation of subjectivity in the modern age. This book also makes even more explicit the revolutionary nature of Foucault's conception of power. For if it is the case that power operates not by means of repression, negation, or deduction, but by production, incitement, and cajoling, then this has radical implications for discourses of liberation in politics and psychology. If power operates by obliging us to produce truth about ourselves, then psychoanalytic notions of freeing an 'inner self' repressed by a Victorian morality are not opposed to power but rather a perfect example of how it functions. The same is true of revolutionary political movements which pose the problem of governance in terms of the liberation of a true consciousness of human essence, or of the transgression of illegitimate norms.

Foucault's work on power has had a substantial impact on anthropological studies of politics, the state, colonialism, and on anthropology's own practice (for instance Ferguson & Gupta 2008; Mitchell 1988; Rabinow 2003; Scott 1995; Stoler 1995). It gave birth to that extensive corpus of anthropological literature on power that Sahlins sought to skewer in

Waiting for Foucault as a ‘neo-functionalism’, in which everything could be explained as an instance of power (or resistance). Yet even as its results were being published his ideas were undergoing further transformation. By 1975, for instance, his brief post-‘68 *détente* with the Marxist left appeared to be over (Paras 2006: 79-81). *Discipline and Punish* contains some ideas sympathetic to Marxism, such as the notion that techniques of discipline were incorporated into the broader capitalist economy, but it fundamentally rejects the thesis that the purpose and origin of such techniques are economic or about serving the interests of a specific class. The *History of Sexuality* Volume One is clearly in part a critique of Marxism’s inherited Hegelian notions of ‘labour as the essence of man’ (Marx 1844; Foucault 1978c: 13) and its juridical and ideological conception of power. The French intellectual climate was also changing: the events of 1968 were receding into memory, and the mid-seventies saw the rise of the *nouveaux philosophes* such as Bernard-Henri Lévy and André Glucksmann, who were bitterly critical of what they saw as a complicity with Stalinism on the part of sections of the French left (Bourg 2007: 227-302). Foucault positively reviewed Glucksmann’s *The Master Thinkers* (1980), noting in its spirit that ‘the decisive test for the philosophers of Antiquity was their capacity to produce sages....in the modern era, it is their aptitude to make sense of massacres. The first helped men to support their own death, the second, to accept that of others’ (1977b). By 1977 his friendship with Deleuze – who despised the *nouveaux philosophes* – seemed also to be over, after a disagreement over Deleuze’s positive position on the Baader-Meinhof gang (Eribon 1989: 411-413).

In terms of this chapter’s focus, we have now reached the crucial juncture in Foucault’s intellectual biography. The exact timing of his ‘ethical turn’ is something of an open question and if one takes the position that there is thoroughgoing continuity across his various phases then one may not wish to see any kind of turn at all. But there is undoubtedly a change of some description that takes place around this time. Foucault himself described an ‘abrupt’ abandonment of his former style around 1975-1976 (Harrer 2005: 77); his 1977 course at the Collège de France, *Security, territory, population* introduced the terms ‘government’ and ‘governmentality’ in the place of ‘power’, as a way of speaking about ‘conduct’, as both a transitive verb (to lead others) and a noun, an ‘open field’ of possible behaviours (1982a: 789); the 1978 course, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, opened an interest in liberalism and the individual; and when the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* finally appeared in 1984, they looked nothing like the books he had projected writing when he began the first volume (see e.g. 1978b: 21).

Yet there is also evidence of significant continuities. Though Foucault has a well-known tendency to read his earlier work retrospectively in the light of whatever he happened to be writing at the time (Flynn 1985: 532), in 1982 he himself made a coherent case for seeing his entire corpus of work as an examination of ‘games of truth’ in relation to the techniques human beings use to understand themselves (1982b). Of these techniques, some are techniques of power and domination, ‘which determine the conduct of individuals’, and on which he had hitherto primarily focussed. Some, on the other hand, are ‘technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being’. He would set out a very similar schema in the introduction to Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality*, suggesting that his work had always been about ‘games of truth’, whether in relation to knowledge, power, or, as it would now become, in relation to the self (1985: 4-5).

What is certain is that Foucault’s interest in the prehistory of modern subjectivity and its roots in Christian confessional practices and the production of truth led him further back in time than he had imagined, and to a topic he had not yet had cause to treat: ethics.

‘The return of the subject’

The French subtitle to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* is ‘The Will to Knowledge’, and we have already seen how central the concerns of truth and knowledge were to Foucault’s work. In the project of *The History of Sexuality* this took a particular form: while it began as a project about how telling the truth about one’s sexual identity and desires was central to the modern understanding of subjectivity, it became a project about the roots of that concern with subjectivity and truth itself.

From the beginnings of the project, Foucault knew that it would take him back further in history than he had hitherto ventured, into Christian confessional practices formalised at the Lateran Council of 1215. Already in the first volume, however, he was distinguishing between what he called an *ars erotica* and a *scientia sexualis*: the latter corresponded roughly with our modern concern for producing ‘truth’ about sexual identity, whilst the former he characterised – clearly with more sympathy – as an ‘Eastern’ interest in the cultivation of pleasure. As he pursued his research into early Christian asceticism further and further back into history, he found a much more concrete instantiation of an *ars erotica* in Greco-Roman Antiquity. This discovery would allow him to pursue the project of a genealogy of the Christian attitude to subjectivity, by demonstrating both its roots and its contingency. The ‘will to knowledge’ that Foucault identifies as the basis of our modern understanding of selfhood emerged slowly and gradually out of a different way of relating to the self, an ancient ‘arts of existence’. Though a fourth volume of *The History of Sexuality*, devoted to Christian confessional practices, was published posthumously (against Foucault’s express wishes in his will) in 2018, most of its content was written before the second and third volumes, and these would focus squarely on Classical Greece and Republican and Imperial Rome.

The distinction between pagan and Christian subjectivity is by no means meant to be absolute, and neither does Foucault present the two categories as in any way homogenous: the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* charts the transition and interpenetration of Imperial Roman and early Christian understandings of the self, and the pre-Raphaelites and Baudelaire are cited by Foucault as at least two examples of a modern version of an aesthetics of existence (see also Faubion 2014). But the differences between pagan and Christian attitudes to sexuality illustrate the way in which this genealogical project led Foucault to an interest in ethics.

In pursuing his history of sexuality Foucault found that the rules and codes governing sexual behaviour actually changed remarkably little over time (1985: 15-22). Infidelity, for instance, or homosexuality, were as much problems for the Greeks and the Romans as they were for early (and of course later) Christians. But the manner in which they appeared as moral problems was quite dramatically different. This is the root of a basic distinction often adopted by anthropologists (though not always in the same fashion – e.g. Laidlaw 2002; Fassin 2015; Zigon 2008): morality, on the one hand, is composed of the set of prescriptive norms and values that determine appropriate behaviour in any given context; ethics, on the other, is the practical and reflective way in which one conducts oneself in relation to such norms and values (although Foucault himself speaks of ‘moralities’ in the broadest sense as encompassing both codes of behaviour and forms of subjectivation – 1985: 29). It is the way in which one constitutes oneself as a (moral or ethical) subject. In a manner reminiscent of his early critiques of ‘juridical’ models of power, Foucault thinks that though certain contexts may lend themselves more to the codification of morality than others and that this might merit some attention, it is the dynamic variation in ethics that is fundamental to the formation of subjectivity (Foucault 1985: 23-25; 30).

To this basic distinction, between ‘moral codes’ and ‘ethics’, Foucault adds four further analytical sub-categories to the latter: ‘practices or techniques of self’; ‘mode of subjectivation’, or how one brings oneself to subscribe to particular moral code; ‘telos’, or the proper ends of ethical action; and ‘ethical substance’, the ‘prime material’ of moral conduct (1985: 26-28). In the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes how the primary object of ethical concern in Ancient Greece was not ‘desire’, as in the modern West, nor ‘flesh’ as it was for early Christians, but pleasure, or *aphrodisia*. This, in turn, entails an entirely different set of techniques or practices of the self to our own.

Practices or technologies of the self are in some ways the most obviously anthropologically-relevant of Foucault’s analytics of ethics, given that they consist of practical, observable activities that may be extreme in their asceticism (e.g. fasting to death, as in Laidlaw 2005; see also Cook 2010 and this volume) but may also be fairly quotidian: paying attention to one’s diet, doing certain forms of exercise, or keeping a diary are all examples. Such practices are work one performs upon oneself as part of forming oneself as an ethical subject. Immediately striking about all of this is how far we seem to have travelled from *Discipline and Punish*: here, rather than ‘subjectivation’ referring to the production of subjectivity by mechanisms of power, it is now chiefly the work the subject performs upon itself to make itself a subject.

A concrete version of this shift is visible in Foucault’s own descriptions of historical changes in technologies of the self. For instance, Christian confessional practices and our own therapeutic society are dominated by a ‘hermeneutics of the self’, in which what is important is to produce the truth about oneself and one’s desires, whereas what is important in Classical Greek ethics is the cultivation of a certain attitude of self-mastery in relation to pleasure. In spheres such as dietetics and erotics the crucial issue was to develop the general capacity for judgment about when, how, and in what way one might take exercise, eat, or have sexual relations, rather than to know what specific sorts of activities are permitted or illicit. The point was not to investigate the nature of the acts of pleasure, or of one’s desire for them, but to make proper, temperate, and austere ‘use’ of them (the title of the second volume is ‘The Use of Pleasure’). So, the particular techniques of the self that Foucault investigates in antiquity are not devoted to the production of an authentic, true self, but to the continuous fashioning of a subjectivity in control of its relationship to pleasure, giving form and style to its existence. A subject, in other words, capable of exercising power over itself in order to create a good and beautiful existence (cf. Faubion 2014).

This notion of ethics or virtue as a matter of craft, technique, and the cultivation of self is a central tenet of Socratic, Aristotelian, and Stoic moral philosophy, one other moral thinkers have also developed (see e.g. Anscombe 1958; MacIntyre 1981, Mair this volume), and Foucault drew on the work of classical scholars such as Kenneth Dover (1978), Peter Brown (1978), and his friend Paul Veyne (see Foucault 1985: 8). In contrast to deontological models of morality and ethics, in which ‘doing good’ is a matter of following rules and prescriptions, the notion of virtue as a craft or *techne*, and the virtuous life as ‘crafting oneself’, or ‘taking care of oneself’ (*techne tou biou*) means taking one’s own life and existence as an object of continuous work. This is important to the broader implications of Foucault’s work because it involves a distinctly non-modern articulation of the relationship between self and other.

By now it should be clear that it is at least possible to read this work as a radical departure from Foucault’s earlier interests, as some scholars have (see below). In contrast to his ‘early’ period, in which the subject appears as a blip in the grand history of systems of thought, and in very marked contrast to his ‘middle’ period, in which the subject is not the premise or the fount but the outcome and the product of power relations, here the object of concern for Foucault is the subject’s relationship to itself. As one critic of this later work has

put it, ‘the obvious paradox of a reflexive account of self-construction is that the self must already exist in order to construct itself’ (Dews 1989: 40); and admirers of ‘late’ Foucault often make exactly the same point in criticism of his work on power: ‘once *some kind of* subject was acknowledged to precede [power]...then the notion that the subject was “produced” at all lost a great deal of its force’ (Paras 2006: 126).

These questions are at the heart of this chapter and it will treat them more fully as we proceed. But it is worth dealing now with one particular contention regarding Foucault’s work on ethics, both because it will help in coming to grips with what is entailed by that work, and because it is often reproduced as a criticism of anthropological writing that draws on Foucault’s claims about ethics. This is the claim – articulated forcefully by Peter Dews and Martha Nussbaum, for instance, amongst others (Dews 1989; Nussbaum 1985) – that this later work is deficient in paying too much attention to the self and not enough or none at all to the self in its relation to others and in its social or political context.

It is true, as Timothy O’Leary points out, that Foucault places a good deal of rhetorical weight on the aesthetic dimension of self-cultivation at times, a fact which has led to charges of dandyism from some, such as Pierre Hadot (1995). What Foucault is describing, so this critique goes, is a process of fashioning the self as a work of art, and that this is fundamentally an amoral and apolitical project. This is effectively the inverse of earlier critiques of Foucault’s work on power which charged him with leaving no space whatsoever for ‘freedom’ or ‘agency’ (see e.g. Alcoff 1990; Fraser 1981; Habermas 1987; Taylor 1984; Walzer 1986).

Both criticisms are rooted in an opposition which Foucault himself diagnoses in a lecture he gave in 1982, since published as *Technologies of the self*. In it he points out two characteristic and related features of modern perspectives on the self: the first is the idea that there is something egoistic, selfish, and inappropriate about the idea of ‘taking care of the self’, that doing so is ‘an immorality...a means of escape from all possible rules’, an attitude due in part to the Christian ascetic tradition of self-renunciation (see also his discussions of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis* – for instance, 1982b); the second is the related idea that morality consists of an external set of rules imposed upon the individual. Whereas precisely the point of his description of Classical ethics – those found in particular in Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality* – is that this distinction between ‘morality’, or relations with others, and ‘taking care of the self’ does not apply in that context. In other words, Foucault’s descriptions of Classical ethics are – in some part – descriptions of a world in which ‘the government of the self and others’ (as his 1982 lecture course was titled) are related enterprises. ‘Taking care of the self’ and ‘taking care of others’ were to some extent part and parcel of the same project. ‘Ethical’ action – understood in Foucault’s sense of the word – and ‘political’ action could be one and the same thing (see Williams this volume and Laidlaw & McKearney this volume; and for the most sustained phenomenologically-inflected critique of Foucault’s understanding of self, see Mattingly 2012; and 2014).

This is clear in Foucault’s descriptions themselves, as David Halperin amongst others has noted (1990). His analysis of the *Alcibiades I*, for instance, makes clear what Timothy O’Leary calls ‘the isomorphism between self-mastery and the mastery of the other’ (2002: 62). In it, Alcibiades and Socrates discuss the former’s political ambitions. Socrates demonstrates that none of the wealth, prestige, and power Alcibiades possesses are sufficient to distinguish him from his political rivals (1982b). It is ‘technique’, or ‘care of the self’, contemplation and meditation on the soul, instead, which will ensure Alcibiades path to success, because it is only by cultivating virtue in himself that he will become capable of exercising it in the governance of others.

Several things are notable about this description. The first is the very explicitly political nature of the ends of self-cultivation in this context. Alcibiades must ‘take care of

himself' in order to be capable of 'taking care of others'. The second is that this practice of self-care happens in relation to another – in this case Socrates – not in isolation: the soul must be contemplated through its reflection in another, and Socrates's pedagogy is an instance of this relation (see 1982b: 25; and Faubion 2001, and this volume). Thirdly, this set of relations explains the persistent importance of temperance and austerity in Classical ethics, despite the lack of Christian notions of sin: it is not that certain acts are bad or sinful by nature, it is that over-indulgence in them, or indulgence in them of the wrong form, demonstrates a lack of self-government, one that is incompatible with a capacity to govern others.

This is also famously visible in the Classical and Hellenistic problematisation of homosexual relations. Greek and Greco-Roman ethics were fully and unashamedly masculine (as Foucault notes, see e.g. 1985: 83). But, as in ethnographic descriptions of comparable attitudes (see e.g. Kulick 1997), what made one a man was not the gender of one's sexual partner, but the dynamic of one's sexual relationships. Men were dominant, active, penetrating partners, whilst only those unfit for command – women, boys, slaves, improper men – were submissive and penetrated. Self-mastery, in other words, was linked to political mastery directly by the masterful attitude one adopted in one's sexual practices. This also helps explain the dynamic attitude to ethics and self-cultivation: the risk of losing one's self-mastery, or of losing one's dominant position over one's sexual partner, was constantly present and had to be constantly guarded against by those who sought the highest offices (hence the serious moral problem of sexual relations between men who were dominant and boys who were submissive, but who would or should nevertheless grow up to be dominant men).

Hadot's critique of Foucault for 'dandyism' is levelled at Volume Three of *The History of Sexuality* ('The Care of the Self') in particular, but this very particularity tells us something: in this volume, as in the others, what Foucault is describing is itself a particular context. By this point he has shifted focus from Classical, Socratic ethics to Hellenistic and Imperial Stoic ethics and unsurprisingly the nature of those ethics has changed. 'Taking care of oneself', which for Alcibiades and Socrates was the proper pursuit of a specific group of men inclined to the leadership of the *polis*, has now become a generalised activity that is in some respects good in and of itself. This is what Foucault refers to as the Roman 'cultivation of self' (1986: 39), rooted in the universalist stoic principles of reason and nature. If we recall Foucault's quadripartite analytic of ethics: many of the practices of the self remain the same, and it is still 'pleasure' that is the central focus; but now it is 'reason' that demands that people take up these practices (as the mode of subjectivation), and it is to the enjoyment of a virtuous and happy life, rather than to political success, that they are directed (as *telos*). It is this model, furthermore, which lends itself to uptake and further transformation in Christian ethics, in which believers – whether a small group of spiritual virtuosi in early Christianity or the whole flock, as in Calvinism – will be expected to subject themselves to a continuous and increasingly codified process of self-examination and self-decipherment, the goal of which is self-renunciation.

So, there is a sense in which Hadot and others are correct: Stoic ethics is not – at least in Foucault's description – directly concerned with political action in the same way as was Classical ethics. But at the same time, that change is part of the much broader historical transformation that leads us back to Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*: '[a]s the ethical system becomes more generalised in its application it becomes more ruthless in its individualising; the emphasis in the process of ethical subjectivation shifts away from the subject as centre of deliberation and activity and towards the subject as "subjected"' (O'Leary 2002: 84). In other words, Foucault is telling us a story about transformations in the relation between the injunctions to care for the self and to care for others, transformations that are affected by wider historical processes. We should not expect that relationship to be

remain exactly the same between (comparatively) democratic Classical Athens and Imperial Rome, nor between the Victorian age and our own.

Janus, or ‘The Masked Philosopher’

Foucault’s work has inspired and continues to inspire countless interpretations and exegeses, many of which focus on the difficult question of whether or not ‘Foucault’s work’ has any kind of continuity to it. I have already noted his own, perhaps characteristically inconsistent responses to this question: on the one hand, he describes himself as constructing a labyrinth into which he can disappear and re-appear at different points, forcing his critics to play philosophical whack-a-mole; on the other hand, he has a notable tendency to read whatever his present concerns are back into previous work, briefly giving us a glimpse of potentially solid philosophical ground before diving back into the detail of whatever bit of history he was examining.

A complete overview of all of these exegeses of Foucault’s work on power and ethics is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead I will briefly outline two basic types of position one might take on the relationship between these two ‘faces’ of Foucault, and their attendant implications for anthropological work on the subject, before going on to sketch out a third such position in my conclusion.

Janus

We have already encountered some versions of the first position one might take on the relationship between conceptions of power and ethics in Foucault, namely that they are incompatible and entirely distinct. This position emerges in polemical form in the work of those – such as Hadot or Nussbaum, but see also Dews (1989), Privitera (1995), Hiley (1984), Best & Kellner (1991) – who attack Foucault’s late work on ethics for its ‘dandyism’ and a perceived over-emphasis on the aesthetic purposes of self-cultivation. But it is also present in work such as Eric Paras’s *Foucault 2.0*, in which the same inconstancy is noted, but now lauded as rescuing Foucault from the totalizing optics of power in which he had previously been caught (2006). A similar point is made less dramatically by Thomas Flynn, who argues that Foucault’s late work ‘fills a gap’ in an otherwise largely structuralist project by supplying an ‘individual, responsible, agent’ (1985). Giorgio Agamben similarly declared Foucault’s late work to have focussed on the one hand on ‘the study of *political techniques*’ and on the other on ‘*technologies of the self* by which processes of subjectivation bring the individual to bind himself to his own identity...and, at the same time, to an external power’ (1998; cited in Faubion 2001). This sort of position is put most starkly by Thomas McCarthy, a critic of both ‘faces’ of Foucault:

[in Foucault’s early period] everything was a function of context, of impersonal forces and fields, from which there was no escape – the end of man. Now the focus is on “those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves...and to make their life into an oeuvre” – with too little regard for social, political, and economic context. (1991: 74; cited in Allen 2000)

Put so polemically, it is hard to see much value in Foucault for an anthropologist if this sort of position is an accurate depiction of his work. Depending upon whether one’s bent is for the ‘early’ or the ‘late’ version, a ‘Foucauldian’ account would either be entirely determinist in

its depiction of ‘impersonal forces’, or it would be a strange and isolated description of ‘voluntary actions’ unmoored from their contexts.

It is hard to credit this reading of Foucault for a number of reasons, some of which we have already examined, and some of which we will look at in the following section. Yet this sort of position is worth attending to for the manner in which it is replicated in some of the ways in which anthropologists talk to one another about the way they make use of him.

We have already met Marshall Sahlins’ acerbic description of the ‘power, power, everywhere’ school of Foucauldian anthropology. Twenty-five years later we find this characterisation echoed in Sherry Ortner’s description of some of Foucault’s work as ‘a virtually totalizing theory of a world in which power is in every crevice of life, and in which there is no outside to power’ (Ortner 2016: 50). In somewhat similar fashion, and citing Sahlins, James Laidlaw noted in his 2001 Malinowski Lecture (2002) that Foucault might have seemed an unlikely ally to muster in support of an ‘anthropology of ethics and freedom’, since he was widely read at the time as ‘an advocate of a bleakly totalizing vision of societies as systems of power/knowledge, where domination and resistance are necessary, pervasive, and mutually implicating aspects of all social relations’ (2002: 322). Laidlaw also notes, as I have, that Foucault himself was ambiguous about this reading of him, but that from the very moment that *Discipline and Punish* was delivered to its publisher, Foucault was ‘thinking himself out of that conception’ (: 322). Ortner too concedes that some of Foucault’s later work ‘moves way from the relentless power problematic’ (2016: 51).

Conversely, Harri Englund articulates in careful fashion a not uncommon feeling of discomfort with the Foucauldian project of the anthropology of ethics when he points to the ways in which a focus on ethics as opposed to morality can over-privilege ideas about ‘personal choices’, and, when ‘cast in pathological terms’, lead to the notion of ‘the separate person’ as the basic unit of human action (2008: 45). Yunxiang Yan is equally concerned by the anti-Durkheimian, anti-‘social’ bent of the new anthropology of ethics, arguing in contrast that ‘morality does not exist in an isolated individual’ (2011). In somewhat less careful fashion, the editors of *Moral anthropology: a critique* claim that ‘[m]uch of the debate in anthropology is revolving around individualist assumptions, a concentration on the dynamics of choice, a subjectivist orientation (that in certain respects has arisen in new guise in the new anthropology of morality)’ (Kapferer and Gold 2018: 9); the anthropology of ethics, at least in its late-Foucauldian versions, is accused of failing to recognise that ethics is ‘conditioned by the political and economic forces of history’ (: 13). In the same volume, Don Kalb condemns the Foucauldian anthropology of ethics as an ‘aggressively antisociological celebration of fundamental human freedom. It tends to lift the capacity to envision and live ethical designs entirely out of its wider social texture...that fundamental freedom, inevitably, also implies that any effort at social explanation must end up as futile or even ill-willed’ (: 69). In a further parallel, this sort of accusation is also sometimes coupled with the assertion that the reasons behind this imputed ‘individualism’ lie in a conscious or unconscious sympathy for ‘neoliberal’ politics, something of which Foucault has also recently been accused (see for instance Behrent and Zamora 2015; Behrent 2010; Zamora 2014).

For a range of reasons, some of which I will treat below, I think it is very hard to sustain McCarthy’s characterisation of either of Foucault’s ‘faces’. But anthropologists drawing on both of those aspects of his work have been accused of virtually the same sins: of entirely neglecting either context or the subject. It seems unlikely, though possible, that such accusations have any more purchase when levelled at Foucault’s anthropological heirs than at the man himself, as I will set out below in the case of the anthropology of ethics. Yet the fact that such accusations persist, and are unlikely to cease in the near future, does at least indicate that the ‘Janus’ position has some weight of numbers behind it, and I will return in my conclusion to the question of why this might be the case.

'The Masked Philosopher'

A number of Foucault's philosophical interpreters have made the case for seeing continuity, rather than discontinuity, in his work. In many ways, as far as the intellectual biography of Foucault is concerned, this case feels considerably more plausible than the 'Janus' reading, certainly in the latter's extreme, polemical forms.

I have already noted, for instance, one way in which Foucault's genealogy of subjectivity can be read as a continuous project, in response to Hadot's critique of 'dandyism'. It is on the face of it simply incorrect to claim that Foucault ceased to be concerned with 'politics', 'relations with others', or 'context' in his later work. Not only did he repeatedly argue that models of self-cultivation 'are proposed, suggested, imposed...by...culture,...society, and...social group' (1984a: 291), he also specifically focussed on practices of self-cultivation by those responsible for 'the government of others', and on the importance of pedagogy – i.e. the often hierarchical relationship between a teacher and student – to such practices (e.g. 1982; 1984a; and Faubion 2001, and this volume). This is not even to mention the work he was doing when he died on *parrhesia*, or truth-telling practices, and their political importance in the classical world and their function in confession and the penal system (e.g. 2011; 2012; 2014).

This continuity is furthermore reflected in Foucault's use of the same word ('*assujettissement*') to describe both the phenomena he was concerned with in *Discipline and Punish* and those in the later volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. The notion that subjectivation is the same process, whether it takes place in the Panopticon or by means of a set of philosophical exercises, is perfectly consistent with his famous claim that there is no 'outside' to power's productive capacities. The two kinds of practice are, as Christoph Menke puts it, 'so close that [one] often seems to be nothing other than [the other] illuminated and evaluated in another light...the two faces of one Janus head' (2003: 200). Likewise, the notion of 'surveillance' found in *Discipline and Punish*, as Sebastian Harrer points out, sounds remarkably like the practices of 'spiritual guidance' found in ethical pedagogy, and he notes that Epictetus even exhorted his disciples to live as if he was constantly watching them; as if, indeed, they were in the Panopticon (2005: 80). Furthermore, of course, the whole point of the Panopticon was *self-discipline*, so Agamben's distinction between one's 'identity' and 'external power' seems decidedly anti-Foucauldian.

Turning to anthropology: as I suggested at the outset of this chapter, it is hard to overstate the influence of Foucault's late work on the development of the anthropology of ethics. Two ground-breaking essays in that field, published nearly simultaneously, both make extensive use of 'late Foucault' in setting out an agenda for what would become the anthropology of ethics. The first is Laidlaw's Malinowski Lecture, which I have already mentioned. In the remainder of that piece Laidlaw sets out Foucault's vision of ethics more or less as I have here, pointing to the centrality of 'freedom' to projects of self-cultivation. Freedom here is not a thing that one can possess but rather something that one exercises, the very practice of 'subjectivation', of making oneself a subject, 'choosing the kind of self one wishes to be' (2002: 324). It does not take place in a vacuum, or in opposition to power or constraint, but through the models and values that the subject finds around itself (see also Heywood 2015). All of this is very much in evidence in Laidlaw's ethnographic descriptions of Jain practices of self-renunciation (see also 1995), which he directly analogises with Foucault's discussions of early Christianity. In both cases self-revelation and arriving at certain truths about oneself is an important pre-condition to self-renunciation. But in the Jain case the proper object of such techniques is not sexual desire but the harm one has necessarily caused to other living beings in the course of simple activities such as breathing

and walking, and so the ‘work’ that one performs upon oneself consists of directing infinitely careful attention to one’s every action and movement.

Though the remark about Foucault’s earlier ‘bleakly totalizing vision’ might suggest that a version of the ‘Janus’ argument is being made here, that is in fact not the case. Laidlaw’s position on the matter is stated clearly elsewhere:

The apparent divergence between two different ways in which Foucault’s ideas have been adopted and adapted by anthropologists owes more to the interests the latter have had in reading him, and to the other intellectual traditions they have been engaging with as they did so, than to any profound discontinuity in Foucault’s own thought, that proceeded in general by incremental steps, taking up new problems and questions as they came into view, correcting what he thought were over-emphases and blind-spots in earlier studies, and broadening the historical and cultural range of his enquiries, to address, ever more searchingly, ever more fundamental questions. (2018: 182)

This is perfectly consistent with the repeated emphasis throughout the Malinowski Lecture and other programmatic work on ethics (e.g. 2013) that the concept of ‘freedom’, drawn from Foucault, ‘is of a definite, historically produced kind. There is no other kind’. (2002: 323).

In the same year in which Laidlaw delivered his Malinowski Lecture, James Faubion published a similarly agenda-setting essay titled ‘Towards an Anthropology of Ethics: Foucault and the Pedagogies of Autopoiesis’ (2001). Setting out the fundamentals of Foucault’s work on ethics and its potential for anthropology, Faubion is also quite clear about where he sits in the ‘continuity’ argument: ‘that antagonists on both sides of [the decisionism vs determinism] quarrel have claimed Foucault as an ally is, I think, indicative less of his ambiguity than of his belonging no more to one side than the other’ (: 94). Or even more explicitly, in describing the centrality of pedagogy to ethical practice: ‘[h]ence...Foucault’s insistence that the self *in its relation to others* is “the very stuff” of ethics’, and later definitively: ‘There is no thinking of ethics without thinking of power’ (: 96-97, original emphasis).

Foucault has appeared in a similar guise in a range of subsequent anthropological work on ethics in diverse areas of life (e.g. Dave 2012; Faubion 2011; Hirschkind 2006; Laidlaw 2013; Mahmood 2004; Robbins 2004; Zigon 2011). I would guess that none of these anthropologists believe that Foucault’s later work can be understood entirely in isolation from that which preceded it, and I think that trying to find a claim or assertion or even an implication in any of this work to the effect that ethical practices take place without reference to power, politics, or context would be a near-impossible task. Yet, as I suggested at the end of the last section, the idea persists, in both studies of Foucault and anthropological arguments more broadly, that there is something unsatisfactorily one-sided about studying ethics in Foucault’s sense of the word. We are no longer ‘waiting for (late) Foucault’, to paraphrase Sahlins, but his arrival seems to have simply changed the way in which some people object to the use of his work, rather than done away with the objections altogether. There are probably not many anthropologists who, like McCarthy, disapprove of both faces of Foucault, but there remain plenty who disapprove of one or the other, and many who, despite all arguments to the contrary, cannot reconcile the one they like with the one they do not.

‘Philosophy without a happy end’

Despite its brevity, I hope that the sketch I have provided of some of the debates surrounding both Foucault’s intellectual biography and his uptake in the anthropology of ethics makes two things clear: that in the case of the former, an argument for continuity is plausible (to say the

least); and that in the case of the latter, a minimally charitable reading would struggle to characterise this work as blind to the importance of context, politics, or power. Yet arguments persist on both counts. Why might this be? Is there anything to be gained from ‘taking caesurism seriously’ in the case of Foucault and ethics (cf. Candea 2018: 174)?

One potential answer to the problem of why these debates persist is suggested by Faubion’s point that Foucault belongs to neither side, and by Foucault’s own remarks on the relationship between ‘care of the self’ and ‘relations with others’ in our modern context: that the ‘Janus’ reading is a product of that same opposition, the contingency of which he sought to demonstrate. The persistence of these debates is not, then, really about one side or the other (hence the frequent mischaracterisations of either side by the other) but about the power of the distinction itself: it is, at some fundamental level, difficult for us to see both of Foucault’s faces at once. This may also help to explain why metaphors of ‘focus’, ‘illumination’, ‘emphasis’, and ‘blind-spots’ are so prevalent in the exegetical literature on ‘continuity’. Even when we attempt to speak about Foucault’s two faces at the same time, we tend to fall back on a language of difference, albeit a heuristic difference of method or perspective. This is brought out most clearly and elegantly in a piece by Amy Allen called ‘The anti-subjective hypothesis’, in which she makes a convincing case for identifying this methodological difference in Foucault’s own work: his analyses of power/knowledge ‘are devoid of references to the concept of subjectivity because they have to be’, she argues. ‘[T]hey have to be devoid of such references because precisely the point of these works is to shift subjectivity from the position of that which explains to the position of that which must be explained, from *explanans* to *explanandum*’ (2000: 120-121). *Ex hypothesi* the same could be said of the (comparatively) limited number of references to power in the later work.

This reading is also supported by an obvious but important fact about Foucault’s work: for the most part, he obliges his readers to do the work of connecting power and ethics themselves, where possible. He does not coin neologisms, and he does not expect to resolve the problem in a single text (both of which Bourdieu, dealing with the problem of ‘structure and agency’ does, for example). The works of Foucault in question span nearly two decades, and range enormously in empirical focus. At no point does he snap his fingers and declare the dichotomy dissolved. What we get instead are long, slow, detailed, empirical analyses of what might appear to be entirely divergent issues, but which to a closer reading may (or may still not) appear related. Given that even this manner of dealing with the relationship between power and ethics has failed to convince many a reader, it should perhaps not surprise us too much that it is hard for Foucault’s successors to do so in the space of, say, a single article. His friend Paul Veyne called his philosophy ‘the rarest of phenomena...philosophy without a happy end’, in its refusal to ‘convert our finitude into the basis for new certainties’ (1993: 5). So, it may be that he was quite content with the notion that the relationship between power and ethics was not a problem it was his job to resolve.

Perhaps one consequent lesson to be drawn from debates in intellectual history surrounding Foucault’s legacy is that even if it is true, for methodological reasons, that it is fundamentally difficult as an enterprise to consider both ‘power’ and ‘ethics’ simultaneously, it is at least possible to consider them separately in such a way that they do not directly compete with one another. Despite his playful remarks about changing his mind, Foucault himself gives us no serious reason to believe that he suffered some world-altering intellectual rupture somewhere between 1975 and 1980, and it would seem somewhat psychologically implausible to assume that he did. In his own mind, at least, it seems to have been a matter of different emphasis, as Allen’s argument and those of numerous other commentators suggest. Different emphases in different arguments need not contradict or compete with one another, and it would be absurd to imagine that Foucault really did have ‘two faces’, each engaged in an ongoing battle with the other. If there are differences in his work it surely makes more

psychological sense and is more faithful to his own self-understanding to see them as different, but complementary, rather than contradictory. Whether or not it is possible to see debates in anthropology surrounding the current focus on ethics in a similar light is a question beyond the scope of this chapter, but perhaps one worth exploring further.

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