

The *meta*-physics of Foucault's ethics: Succeeding where Levinas fails

A. B. Hofmeyr

Jan van Eyck Academy
Academieplein 1
6211KM Maastricht
The Netherlands

and

University of Pretoria
Department of Philosophy
Pretoria
South Africa

b.hofmeyr@maw.ru.nl or bhofmeyr@zonnet.nl

Abstract:

This essay aims to critically assess the later Foucault's ethical turn by using Levinas's ethical metaphysics as critical yardstick. Foucault's notion of ethical subjectivity constitutes a site of resistance against externally imposed subjugating subject identities. Apart from a practice of freedom, Foucault also insists that it engenders the subject with a generous responsiveness towards others.

Despite Foucault's other-aspirations, it seems probable that care of the self would fall short ethically when compared to Levinas's insistence upon an unconditional openness towards the Other. Upon closer investigation, however, we find that Levinas's ethical metaphysics is founded upon phenomenological analyses of our immanent 'economic' existence here and now in the world. Although he maintains that metaphysics or 'transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same' (Levinas, 1979:43/13) is primary, the immanent process of the subject's 'auto-personification' (*ibid.*, p.147/120) serves as a necessary condition for the possibility of becoming ethical, of welcoming the Other. Moreover, contrary to Foucault's self-caring subject, who actively partakes in its own ethical self-formation, Levinas's existent has no educable ethical sensibility. It is powerless against the gravitational pull of its egoism, condemned to a hopeless amorality unless the Other intervenes and saves it from itself. I shall therefore argue that Foucault's account of ethical self-becoming invests the subject with a *meta*-physical potential, which it is denied by Levinas's ethical metaphysics.

This essay will attempt to uncover the way in which Foucault's conception of ethics as care of the self succeeds where Levinas's prioritization of the Other fails. It will proceed by way of the following argumentative sequence: First I sketch our present day moral crisis that renders their respective conceptions of ethicality pertinent. I then pro-

ceed by reconstructing their particular conceptions of ethical subjectivity. To conclude, I outline my case in favour of Foucault.

1. Context: today's moral crisis

Zygmunt Bauman characterizes the 'post'-modern age not in the chronological sense (i.e. not in the sense of displacing and replacing modernity *after* its decline), but in the sense of implying that the laborious efforts of modernity – to find a *non-ambivalent, non-aporetic moral code* – have been misguided and are bound to fail in the end. The dawn of the *post*-modern age is therefore the result of the modern age reaching its self-critical and, in many ways, self-dismantling stage (Bauman, 1993:2). In other words, it is concomitant with the realization that a universal and 'objectively founded' moral code is a practical impossibility, perhaps also an *oxymoron*, a contradiction in terms (*ibid.*, p.10).

Bauman further states that the two widely held moral assertions – mutually contradictory, yet stated with the same force of conviction – that (1) humans are essentially good, and that they only have to be assisted to act according to their nature [roughly the Greek/Foucaultian ethical point of departure]; and that (2) humans are essentially bad, and they must be prevented from acting on their impulses [roughly the Judeo-Christian/Levinasian ethical starting point]¹, are both wrong. According to Bauman, humans are morally ambivalent, moral conduct cannot be guaranteed, and we need to live without such guarantees and come to grips with their unattainability (*ibid.*, pp.10-11). More profoundly perhaps, Bauman characterizes our anomic and amoral postmodern waters as the result of the dismantlement of the basic premises of the two archetypes of justice, goodness, ethicality, Jerusalem and Athens.

2. The turn to ethics

While there is something to be said for Bauman's excessive scepticism, it does not necessarily have to lead to passive resignation. Apart from the demise of oppressive moral codes and absolute obligations (with the hailing of a post-deontic epoch), the so-called postmodern approach to morality is also often associated with the substitution of aesthetics for ethics. For some this signals some kind of 'ultimate emancipation' whereas for others aesthetics precisely invests freedom with responsibility. I think we shall all agree that we live in an age in which uncontentious moral authorities (due to their political exploitation) no longer exist, on the one hand, and that obedience to a given corpus of universally valid, prohibitive rules of conduct is no longer a viable option for most, on the other.² The consequence of this 'absence of morality', as Foucault (Lotringer, 1996: 451) describes it, is the necessity of agents to take responsibility and make choices for their own ethical self-constitution. Put differently, the falling of

1 Cf. Levinas 1991:11/13: 'No one is good voluntarily'. The straightforward alignment of Levinas with Jerusalem nevertheless remains problematic. See, for example, 'Transcendence and height' in Peperzak, Critchley & Bernasconi (Eds.) 1996: 24: 'But it's the fundamental contradiction of our situation (and perhaps of our condition), which I called Hypocrisy in my book [*Totalité et infini*], that both the hierarchy taught by Athens and the abstract and slightly anarchical ethical individualism taught by Jerusalem are simultaneously necessary in order to suppress violence. Each of these principles, left to itself, only furthers the contrary of what it wants to secure'.

2 It could be argued that the contemporary resurgence of fundamentalist and extreme moral and political projects, as is exemplified by Islam fundamentalism, for example, is evidence in favour of our moral quandary, rather than evidence against it. At the very least, it is evidence of an intense contemporary 'problematization' of morality (O'Leary, 2002:177, footnote 28).

morality into disrepute (or, historically speaking, on hard times) has instigated the *turn to ethics*, which, according to Foucault's formulation, can be understood as a reevaluation of the *self's* relation to itself – of the ways in which we constitute ourselves as ethical subjects of our actions.³ Although Bauman agrees that individuals now have to take responsibility for their own ethical self-formation – they now have to decide for themselves how to act and which normative/moral criteria to take into account in this decision – they still seem unprepared for the task at hand,⁴ for, as Bauman explains

'[o]urs is the era of unadulterated individualism and the search for the good life, limited solely by the demand for tolerance (when coupled with self-celebratory and scruple-free individualism, tolerance may only express itself as indifference' (Bauman, 1993:3).

Foucault's turn to the self

While Foucault shares Bauman's suspicion of metaphysical certitudes and grand moral narratives, he nevertheless advocates an activism – a pessimistic but nonetheless hyper-activism (Foucault, 1983b:343). He believes the self to be *educable*: he invests or entrusts the subject with an inherent potential for ethicality, a sensibility educable through careful techniques of the self.⁵ This is to be understood as a form of *askesis*, which is meant in the Greek sense of self-discipline rather than the Christian sense of self-denial. He sees the subject not as a substance, but as a form (Foucault, 1984:12) – receptive, responsive and responsible precisely because of its ability to be moulded and formed through the disciplined and diligent repetition of the practices of the self. Not that Foucault believes the self to have some intrinsically good essence or core. According to him,

1. one first has to identify that part of oneself or one's behaviour (*the ethical substance*) in need of ethical attention [IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM];
2. this is followed by choosing and establishing a relationship with a rule of conduct (*the mode of subjection*) [WHICH RULE IS GOING TO FIX THE PROBLEM?];
3. in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with the chosen rule, in the third instance, the subject has to perform ethical labour to transform him/herself into an ethical subject (*the self-forming activity*) [WHAT MUST I DO TO TRANSFORM MYSELF?];
4. in the final instance, one has to decide what kind of being one is attempting to become by means of these ascetical practices (*the telos*) [WHAT IS THE GOAL I WANT TO ACHIEVE?] (Foucault, 1992b:26-28/33-35).⁶ The moral value of every individual action is determined by the overarching mode of being of the agent. As Foucault explains, it is an 'element and an aspect of [the ethical subject's] conduct,

3 Foucault defines ethics as 'the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, *rappont a soi...* which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions' (1983b:352).

4 Kant had a name for this 'unpreparedness' – he called it our 'immaturity' (Foucault, 1983a: 34; Kant 1784:7). He blames humankind for being incapable of making use of its understanding without direction from another. The crux of contemporary society's ethical quandary seems to be that individuals still seem to lack the resolution and courage to use their understanding.

5 Bennett (1996:654), for example, concurs that Foucault's aesthetics, aesthetics as sensibility-formation, establishes a range of possibility in perception, enactment, and responsiveness to others.

6 References to Foucault's and Levinas's primary texts include the English page references followed by the French page references.

and it marks a stage in its becoming, a possible advance in its continuity' (Foucault 1992b: 28/35; modified).⁷

The self's relationship to itself can also be understood in terms of *poiesis* – the Greek term for creation or production, which unlike mere action [*praxis*] or doing, is aimed at an end [*telos*].⁸ This does not mean that Foucault is proposing a teleological ethic however. The *telos* consists in change, in transforming oneself into an ethical subject – the precise form of which is not known or determinable beforehand. Instead of the *telos* determining the production, it is the production process itself that determines the end product. Ultimately, it is the process of sculpting itself, the skilful taking away and shaping of the material that determines the final sculpture.

This picture of subjectivity emerges in Foucault's genealogy of ethics, in his journey to Greece,⁹ which has always been avowedly motivated by present concerns rather than a disinterested curiosity about the past (Foucault 1992a: 31/35). Foucault's return to antiquity was therefore driven by his desire to develop a contemporary 'post-moral(ity)' ethics of self-transformation.¹⁰ It constituted a response to our present condition of ever-diminishing freedom, which Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and genealogy of power uncovered. He saw our contemporary subjugating subject identities as the result of precisely such normative power/knowledge constructions as are embodied in prescriptive moralities. The self in Greco-Roman guise therefore also appears as a site of resistance against and subversion of those forces that limit our scope for action and being. The self is now able to (trans-)form itself in the face of all those material, historical, economic, discursive and linguistic structures, practices and drives that constitute subjectivity and of which the subject is an effect.¹¹ In short, ethics constitutes a way out of an overdetermination by power/knowledge.

7 We are here reminded of Aristotle's thesis that virtue is perfected by its own use, demanding from the agent a permanent actualization that ultimately will make it habitual. Indeed, the idea that action determines a 'mode of being characteristic of the moral subject' clearly evokes Aristotle's definition of *hexis* as a 'state of character' or a 'relatively permanent disposition' progressively acquired through the repetition of specific actions, as *The Nicomachean Ethics* says: 'Moral virtue comes about as a result of habit... For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts' (Aristotle, 1980:28-29 [1103^a 11-33]). The act does not completely disappear in its being effected but subsists by leaving its trace in the subject's potentiality as an *hexis* (*ibid.*, p.131 [1136^b 32 1137^a 20]; pp. 156-158 [1144^b 1 – 1145^a 11]). In this way, the modification of being that Foucault speaks about can only occur through the deliberate and reflective repetition of certain actions judged to be virtuous, which in the passage from the quantitative to the qualitative slowly transforms the *ethos* of the individual.

8 Judith Butler (2000: 214) briefly mentions *poiesis* in relation to Foucault's conception of self-making.

9 Classical antiquity (the Greco-Romans) advocated virtue ethics: virtues, that is, qualities such as self-mastery and temperance or moderation, are defined as good qualities to possess, because a life lived in accordance with the virtues is the happiest and most rewarding kind of life. Happiness refers not just to feeling happy, but *being* happy (well-being) (Norman, 1998: 39).

10 Foucault nevertheless never properly developed an 'ethics', for he did not believe in alternative solutions and he certainly did not want to construct anything that might be construed as a prescriptive code distinguishing between right and wrong. His conception of ethics as the self's relation to itself precisely testifies to his hostility towards morality exclusively defined by its adherence to a punitive moral code.

11 Note that Foucault is not hereby proposing that the subject can ever entirely be 'outside' of power, but rather that this fact *does not* entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination (Gordon (Ed.), 1980: 141, my emphasis). The struggle against the submission of subjectivity (Foucault, 1982: 212) is precisely possible because it takes place in the same place as power. If we understand the

Levinas's turn to the Other

Levinas's turn to the Other was also supported by a profound suspicion of morality. The Preface of *Totalité et infini* starts with the following remark: 'Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether or not we are not duped by morality' (Levinas, 1979:21/ix). Are we not being fooled by great moral principles such as liberty, equality, and fraternity into believing that our existence is inherently meaningful?¹² Levinas's traumatic wartime experiences stripped him of all such illusions and his entire philosophical oeuvre is animated by the search for a way out of the absurdity and irremissibility of being or existence. He will finally come to see ethics, or our relationship to the Other, as constituting such a way out, as that which makes our being truly meaningful.

Levinas's earliest three works, *De l'existence a l'existant* (1947), *Le temps et l' autre* (1948) and *Totalité et infini* (1961) are primarily concerned with the transcendence or self-transcendence of the self, and he presents it as a defence of subjectivity (Levinas 1979: 26/xiv). In terms of the presentation of the question of self-transcendence in Levinas's work itself, it certainly precedes and (in these early works) is never eclipsed by the question of ethics. The problem of the subject's escape [*évasion*] from itself, from the unbearable heaviness of being to which it is riveted,¹³ is resolved in the course of these works in terms of ethics or the encounter with the Other. Levinas then maintains that the subject only truly comes into being – in any meaningful sense – as ethical subject, that is, after the Other has 'converted' me *from myself to face my infinite responsibility towards others*.¹⁴ This Other paradoxically lifts my existential burden by weighing me down with responsibility. It therefore does not announce a change that the subject will bring about in herself, like it does for Foucault, but signals the subject's *inability* to save itself by itself, that is, the subject's absolute dependence upon the Other. In what sense then is the existent's economic existence in the world, which Levinas considers to be pre-ethical at best, and non-ethical at worst, nevertheless ethically *necessary*? After all, Levinas considers the subject's egotistical exploits in the world a crucial condition for the possibility of becoming ethical.

This escape route out of ourselves and our meaningless existence paradoxically has its starting point in the self. The early Levinas's phenomenological analyses describe

exercise of power as a mode of action upon the action of others, the freedom to act and to react is implicit to power. That is why resistance to power can only occur amidst relations of power (*ibid.*, p. 221; Gordon (Ed.), 1980: 142). In other words, being situated amidst the forces that constitute subjectivity does not mean that we cannot counter them through self-creation – unless these forces amount to a physical determination.

The moral demands made on individuals in antiquity did not inhibit their conduct by ways of prohibitions, but incited them to exercise and affirm their privilege, potential and autonomy. The themes of austerity did not express essential interdictions, but should be understood as the elaboration and stylization of an activity in the exercise of its power and the practice of its liberty (Foucault, 1992b: 23/30).

- 12 As we know, liberty, equality and fraternity were the aspirations of modern radical ideologies. History testifies to the fact that these ideas ended up trampling the very things they sought to advance.
- 13 Even though Levinas seemed to want to forget his earliest work, an essay entitled, 'De l'évasion' (1935), it is concerned with this theme exactly: the escape [*évasion*] of the subject from itself. In this essay, Levinas does not yet see any solution (the question of ethics has not yet arisen) and it ends with the idea that this attempt to escape is doomed to fail.
- 14 For Levinas, ethics precedes ontology, that is, my existence only becomes truly meaningful when confronted by the Other. To be is to be better than being – both before and beyond ontology – ethical metaphysics.

the subject or existent's 'auto-personification' (Levinas, 1979:147/120). During its 'economic life' in the world, the existent cares for itself and forms itself as independent entity. Only as auto-positing or self-created can it be host to the other – receive the other not with empty hands, but with something to give.

For Levinas, then, care of the self in the world or 'economic existence' is not constitutive of ethics, but the necessary condition for ethics. I have to care for myself before I can take up my responsibility towards others – the primary and only way in which Levinas understands ethics. However, I am incapable of taking up this responsibility of my own accord. Levinas's subject is ethically inept, naturally inclined to persist in the blind pursuit of its self-serving drives and desires. I can only 'become' ethical by virtue of the Other that 'makes' me ethical. And, according to Levinas, the Other will paradoxically only do it for me once I have created myself as fully-fledged *atheist* existent who needs nothing and no one.¹⁵ For him, ethics precisely signals the self's inability to lighten its existential load and curb its hopelessly amoral nature. Only the Other can invest its egotistical and other-reductive freedom with another orientation. After the Other's intervention, I am no longer *involuntarily* concerned only with myself, but freed from the gravitational pull of my egoism – free to face the responsibility I bear towards *other* people. Becoming an ethical subject is thus a form of subjectivization equivalent to the subjection of my freedom to the Other. In Kantian terms, the Other imposes necessity upon my arbitrary subjective freedom. The Other's ethical address is something that I cannot *not* hear, because the Other endows me with a receptiveness; the Other puts the idea of Infinity into me, which makes my blind and deaf egoism¹⁶ receptive and responsive and finally responsible. Once made responsible, the egoist atheist existent becomes an ethical subject [*creature*]. According to Levinas, then, care of the self is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for becoming ethical.

3. Functional analogy: ethical significance of care of the self

'Economics' of existence in Levinas can therefore be understood as a kind of 'aesthetics of existence', since it constitutes a step in the self's ethical becoming – it crafts a

15 Levinas shows that man stands apart from everything else: 'un être séparé'. He is even separated from God. In this sense, Levinas can say that man is essentially atheistic: 'un être athée'. See for example *Difficile Liberté*, p. 31, footnote 1: 'It is a great glory for the Creator to have made a being who affirms him, after having contested and denied him in the fascination of myth and of enthusiasm; it is a great glory for God to have created a being capable of searching for him or of hearing him from afar, beginning from separation, beginning from atheism'. The atheism of which Levinas speaks here is the liberation from all gods and from captivity by mythical powers. This can be understood as a modern version of the struggle against false idols. Also see Levinas, 1979:148/121: 'To be I, atheist, at home with oneself, separated, happy, created – these are synonyms'.

16 Levinas describes subjectivity as purely economic entity as follows: 'Separation is accomplished positively as the interiority of a being referring to itself and maintaining itself of itself – all the way to atheism! ...It is an essential sufficiency, which in its expansion...is even in possession of its own origin' (Levinas, 1979:299/275). Levinas depicts interiority as a separation so radical one in no way derives one's being from contact with the other. It is to draw one's existence from oneself and from nothing else. According to Levinas, this being is supposedly free to either do the right or the wrong thing. However, left to its own devices the separated I will remain so, that is, naturally inclined to retain its independence and egocentric pleasures. It does not voluntarily turn towards the Other, but remains entirely deaf to the Other. In enjoyment, the I is entirely for itself – 'without ears, like a hungry stomach' (Levinas, 1979: 134/107, my emphasis). It is precisely the Other, and *only* the Other, absolutely other, that initiates the conversion or reorientation *despite* the I. The contented closed system of egocentrism is confronted by something it cannot resist, despite its self-sufficiency. Thus a transcendent Other is needed to save this hopelessly egoist self from itself.

self susceptible or receptive to the idea of Infinity through which it will be able to answer the Other's appeal. Put differently, as an essential preparatory 'stage'¹⁷ it testifies to the ethical necessity of self-concern. Both Foucault's subject and Levinas's existent are concerned with the self, and both insist that this egocentrism is an imperative for the possibility of *becoming ethical*.

We have seen that Foucault conceives of care of the self as that process whereby the ethical subject crafts itself through the internalization of certain self-imposed moral codes, which would then serve as an internal regulatory principle in social interaction. For Foucault, then, ethics is the relation one establishes with oneself, which would determine how one ought to act. And how one ought to act is by extension how one ought to act *towards others*. Care of the self consequently derives its qualification as *ethical* practice, in the second but definitive instance, from its social situatedness. If the self was not a self that related to, interacted with, and whose actions would have an effect upon others, care of the self might have qualified as an aesthetics of existence, but not as an ethics (*cf.* Foucault, 1984:7). In fact, according to the Greek/Foucaultian formulation, aesthetics is indispensable to ethics, that is, without care for self there would be no care for others. Similarly, without the existent's economic auto-personification, the Levinasian subject would be incapable of establishing a relation with the Other. However, their respective conceptions of economic/aesthetical self-formation part ways, i.e. the (functional) analogy ends when it becomes apparent that Foucault's subject is responsible for and *actively* partakes in her own ethical becoming, while Levinas's existent is completely dependent upon and has to *passively* await the Other's intervention. This ethical ineptitude or passivity of pre-ethical life should not be confused with the *ethical* subject's radical passivity. Levinas explains radical passivity as follows: This passivity is '[n]ot the passivity of inertia, a persistence in a state of rest or of movement'. Rather, it refers to 'the capacity to undergo the cause that would bring it out of that state' (Levinas, 1991: 75/94). Radical passivity therefore disrupts 'that state' of irresponsibility – the passivity of pre-ethical life.

To better understand this crucial distinction, we need to reconstruct the deployment of subjectivity in Levinas. Before Levinas introduces the Other, as we have seen, he directs our attention to a 'level of life' ontologically prior to that on which the ethical encounter with the other person occurs. He describes what may provisionally be termed the 'developmental stages' of the existent alone in the world. Like Foucault's ethical subject, the Levinasian existent, in its incipient deployment, is also engaged in certain practices that will enable it to become independent and self-converted through the necessary care of the self. This essentially *economic* existence takes the form of a *living off/from* provisional exteriority in the world to constitute an interiority. These practices of 'self-care' enable the existent to cultivate a certain independence or self-sufficiency – to become 'independent in its own fortress' (as Foucault would have said (Foucault 1990b: 65/82)) – which frees it from any fear of future insecurity and allows it to enjoy life.¹⁸

This resultant self-stylized self needs nothing and nobody, a self who has learnt how to become independent even though it is dependent upon something that offers no

17 The use of words such as 'phase' or 'stage' is problematic in Levinas, for they suggest some sort of chronological progression. We shall therefore use inverted commas throughout to indicate this.

18 According to the ancient practice, to convert to oneself is to turn away from the preoccupations of the external world, from the fear of the future (Foucault, 1990b:66/83). It is a daily labour but the effort required makes for a happy self, a self that delights in itself (*ibid.*, p. 65/82).

guarantees. The supposed autonomy is therefore steeped in a heteronomy: the self-actualized subject is at bottom subject to a law 'external' to itself, i.e. beyond its control. The Levinasian existent is what it is by virtue of the negativity at the heart of its existence – the effort to evade the gravity of materiality and solitude, the absurdity of being.¹⁹ In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas describes it in the following terms: 'The interiority of the home is made of extraterritoriality in the midst of the elements of enjoyment with which life is nourished' (Levinas, 1979:150/124). It is this 'nothingness' at the centre of being that will open a dimension in interiority 'through which it will be able to await and welcome the revelation of transcendence'. This 'frontier' does *not* come from 'the revelation of the Other... but somehow from nothingness' (*ibid.*). Here in *Totality and Infinity* the ethical subject is therefore still host to two conditions at the same time – both an independent egoist self *and* capable of self-critique, which makes the call of the Other *audible* to this 'hungry stomach without ears' (Levinas 1979: 134/107). This dimension of heteronomy, which facilitates self-critique, inaugurates the subject's dependence upon the Other, who will enable it to transcend its egoist nature and face its infinite responsibility towards others. In the works that follow, Levinas will disavow the subject's economic existential base, but up to this point it still functions analogously to the Foucaultian subject's efforts at ethical formation in which a recalcitrant nature is submitted to a self-chosen rule to craft a certain self.

The Foucaultian *self-forming* subject is embedded in power/knowledge networks that constantly threaten to overdetermine the subject.²⁰ Self-stylization is an exercise in which these power/knowledge relations are bent and formed to create an inside of the self from the outside of power, as Deleuze (1988: 100) explains.²¹ The heart of interiority is thus made of exteriority.²² While this is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for Levinas, I shall contend in the conclusive part of this essay that the disciplined repetition of the practices of the self creates – of its own accord – an opening for alterity to exist as such. Left to its own devices, the Levinasian existent is doomed to a hopeless amorality. Levinas hereby inadvertently cedes ethical responsibility to an Other. Foucault's subject, on the other hand, is itself capable of transgressing itself, of remoulding those limits of its identity that tend to violate others.

4. Foucault's allegiance to the other through the practices of the self

To fully appreciate the ethical significance of Foucault's preoccupation with the self, we have to lay baer how these practices or techniques of self invest the subject with what I would call a *meta-physical* potential. This is meant in two senses, which correspond to Foucault's two-pronged conception of ethics: in the first instance, it endows the power/knowledge-determined subject with the means to *go beyond, change, challenge, or cut across* these physical forces of which the subject can never fully dissoci-

19 What Levinas refers to as the ever-present rumbling of the *there is (il y a)*.

20 As we have noted before, for Foucault, there is no outside where power is concerned; it is what radically defines us (Foucault, 1990a:98/130).

21 Cf. Deleuze, 1988:100: "It is as if the relations of the outside folded back to create a doubling, allow a relation to oneself to emerge, and constitute an inside which is hollowed out and develops its own unique dimension: 'enkrateia', the relation to oneself that is self-mastery, 'is a power that one brought to bear on oneself in the power that one exercised over others' (how could one claim to govern others if one could not govern oneself?)." Deleuze here includes a quotation from Foucault (1992b:80-81/93-94).

22 In this sense, it could be argued – analogously to Levinas – that this way in which subjectivity is formed, this interiorization of exteriority, is the condition of possibility for a non-reductive relation to the other.

ate itself.²³ In the second, and perhaps ethically definitive sense, it enables the subject to *transcend* its 'physical', i.e. its human-all-too-human nature, which Levinas's existent cannot evade without an intervention by a transcendent Other.

Levinas's account of subjectivity creates the impression that the subject finds itself caught between two equally undesirable alternatives: as a deaf and hungry egoism, it finds itself *involuntarily* and exclusively concerned with fulfilling its own needs. Once confronted and converted by an irresistible Other, it is reduced to a 'deathlike passivity' in *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence* (Levinas, 1991:124/159).²⁴ Radical passivity is a pivotal notion in the Levinas's mature thinking:

'passivity in the radical sense, before it is simply opposed to activity, is passive with regard to itself, and thus submits to itself as though it were an exterior power. Hence, passivity...harbours in itself... a potentia' (Wall, 1999:1).

It is this force that opposes and subjects our egoist freedom. It does not suggest a struggle against our egotistical drives and desires but their incapacitation – a debilitating traumatization. Radical passivity should therefore be understood as a paralysis that paradoxically mobilizes us, because it neutralizes that which prevents us from acting ethically. Without taking a leap of faith, which it is only able to take by virtue of the Other, the existent is doomed to remain radically irresponsible. If it does 'take' this leap, its reprehensible egotistical nature is violently torn out (*cf.* Levinas, 1991:74/93) and it is loaded down with an infinite responsibility, a debt with which it is stuck and cannot repay, even though it is not self-incurred.²⁵ According to Levinas, this 'exposure [to the Other] as a sensibility is more passive still' than the passivity of irresponsibility, of atheist enjoyment:

"it is like an inversion of the conatus of esse, a having been offered without any holding back, a not finding any protection in any consistency or identity of a state" (*ibid.*, p.75/94).

Foucault's alternative nevertheless still needs to account for the definitive *ethical* question: why would the other concern his self-caring self? Why would his subject not persist in self-serving enjoyment? According to Levinas, this question only has meaning

23 One definition of the Greek word 'meta' is transcending, or going above and beyond. Other meanings include 'among, with, after, change'. Whereas in some English words the prefix indicates 'change' (for example, *metamorphosis*), in others, including those related to data and information, the prefix carries the meaning of 'more comprehensive or fundamental' (*cf.* <http://search390.techtarget.com/gDefinition/0,294236,sid10...gci212555,00.html>).

24 To be sure, this passivity precedes any opposition between passivity and activity. It is like receiving a bill; we can leave it unopened, but that does not mean that we do not owe the money. We are 'passive' towards our debt – it is not something we can undo or evade. In Levinas, it is the Other that reminds us of our debt – of the responsibility we bear towards others. The ethical subject's vulnerability towards the Other is a pre-conscious, pre-reflective sensibility.

25 Visker (1999: 382) describes it as a '*vague debt*.' Because the debt is vague, the debtor does not know *what* he must do in order to repay it (he is "denied access" to it); and because it is a debt – something which obligates the subject – he cannot give up the debt (break free of it) without losing himself or, more precisely, without losing what singularizes him and thereby losing his own singularity'.

In the latter part of TI, Levinas will declare these two movements – of immanence (the economic existence of the atheist existent or *ileity*) and transcendence (the ethical existence of the *creature*) – simultaneous, thereby perhaps creating more problems than he seeks to solve. For why would we have to combat the evil of egoism if everyone was *always-already* turned and turning to face their infinite responsibility towards others? (*cf.* Levinas 1979: 139/112; 305/282).

if one has already supposed that the ego is concerned *only* with itself. He maintains that in the 'prehistory' of the ego posited for itself speaks a responsibility. However, this 'prehistory' can only be made present by the Other. For Foucault, on the other hand, ethicality is realized through self-creation and not through Other-invocation. Foucault situates the self and the other as nodes in networks of power/knowledge. Every self-crafting nodal point is in constant contact with the *provisional* alterity of heteronomous forces and with what Levinas might have called the '*absolute*' alterity of other selves. This non-indifference to the other fosters self-critique through the transgression of the limits of the self that is nevertheless not at the expense of the self. Although these self-creating selves are in constant agonistic tension with other selves, it is also never at the expense of the other. The violence of the limits of the self is countered by enlarging them to make room for the other as other. In Deleuze's words, if the inside is constituted by the folding of the outside, there must be a topological relation between them: 'the relation to oneself is homologous to the relation with the outside and the two are in contact'. The other concerns the Foucaultian subject, because the other is never absolutely outside-me. The other is not posited as binary opposition but freed to exist as difference through the active repetition of self-critical practices of the self. This reading does not only constitute a response to the Levinasian criticism levelled against Foucault but also presents us with an approach to ethics in a time when morality falls short. What is at stake for Foucault is not only our freedom but also the resumption of responsibility for our own ethical self-formation.

To buttress this reading and better understand how and to what extent the Greek/Foucaultian practices of the self enable the subject to go beyond/transcend its other-reductive 'nature', we have to briefly return to his 1970 essay, *Theatrum Philosophicum*. In this essay, Foucault's condemnation of the other-reductive tendencies of the same/self and his plea for the rights and value of alterity are unequivocal. He rejects (1) good sense as that which gives preference to the common elements underlying difference; (2) dialectics as that which dismisses difference as the opposite of identity; and (3) categorical thought as that which serves only to subject differences by sorting them according to common elements. It is not surprising then that Foucault's expressly *ethical* works fail to (or rather *refuse* to) provide us with an adequate account of the other person, as if such a representation would reduce the other's alterity to what is simply contrary to the self.

Foucault's refusal is a response to what he considers the immorality wired into the conventional morality of good and evil. It is the same morality that separates good people from evildoers; the sane from the mad. This same morality calls the self selfish and the Other good by virtue of his/her alterity, or alternatively, labels the Other evil by virtue of his/her refusal to conform, to fit in and abide by an arbitrary order. To reach beyond the immorality of good and evil is to embrace an ethics where the emphasis is on the way in which the self and the other person interact. It is an interaction marked not by 'the transcendentalization of contingent identities' (Connolly, 1993: 109) but by a generosity fostered through care of the self, to be able to care for others. This generosity is not to be found within an oppositional structure that distinguishes between the inside of the self and the outside of the other. Instead we find that the self and the other feature as nodes in networks of power/knowledge, or more precisely, they appear as relations of force, whose point of contact functions as the limit that separates them. Foucault's insistence upon the all-pervasiveness of power/knowledge, upon the fact that there is no outside where power is concerned (Foucault, 1990a:

98/130) might make it difficult to locate or recognize the limits separating the inside of the self from the outside of power, but there *is* a limit (for without limits transgression would be impossible). This limit is not fixed, however. Instead, 'the outside' appears in the form of

'a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside...'

Here Deleuze (1988: 96-98) describes the inside [of Foucault's self] as 'an operation of the outside... an inside which is merely the fold of the outside, as if the ship were a folding of the sea'. The Other is in me – immanent. To be sure, this *other in the same* is not the violent imposition of the other in me and on me to the point of 'divesting' or 'emptying' the self of its being, as in the later Levinas (Levinas, 1991:117/149). It is not the 'de-substantiation' or 'subjection' of the subject (*ibid.*, p.127/163) but precisely its subjectivization – the remoulding of its limits to craft a new form of subjectivity with an increased scope for thinking, acting and being.

Both in its outwardly directed resistance to power and its self-directed practical exercises, the self bends these power relations inwards to create and repeatedly reshape an inside. In this way, the zone of subjectivization is created as a work of art. And if the inside is constituted by the folding of the outside, the constituent 'parts' – the self and what lies beyond the limits of the self – must be interrelated or arranged in such a way that they are in contact (*cf.* Deleuze, 1988:119). And thus by caring for myself, I necessarily also take responsibility for the other. The limits of the self are enlarged to make room for the other as other. The other's alterity is not attenuated because the other is not reduced to one pole in a binary opposition. The only way in which difference is freed to exist as alterity is through the *active* repetition of the practices of the self... 'for in concentrating on this boundless monotony, we find the sudden illumination of multiplicity itself': 'suddenly, arising from the background of the old inertia of equivalences, the striped form of the event tears through the darkness' (Foucault, 1970: 189). The secret of Foucault's ethics of the self is 'to await, in the always unpredictable conclusion to this elaborate preparation, the shock of difference' (*ibid.*, p. 190) – not as something introduced from the outside, as in Levinas, but as a necessary by-product of the workings of the inside.

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