FOUCAULT
STUDIES

REVIEW

Karsten Schubert, *Freiheit als Kritik: Sozialphilosophie nach Foucault.* **Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018. Pp. 359. ISBN: 978-3-8394-4317-6 (paperback).**

Michel Foucault's work has been confronted with many questions regarding the foundations of philosophy. Just like his work on the epistemological soil of civilization and knowledge, the question of human freedom has been brought up countless times in the reception of Foucault's work. And justifiably so. His descriptions of the interconnectedness of power and knowledge, the practices of pathologisation and incarceration and the profound effects these mechanisms have on the formation of sexuality and identity of subjects can seem deterministic. Many authors have put forth their interpretations and critiques on the concepts of freedom found in Foucault's work since Foucault himself never released a work dedicated to the topic of freedom. "Freiheit als Kritik" by Karsten Schubert, a revised version of his doctoral thesis, attempts to bring order into this messy debate still raging to this day, while advocating for a new concept of freedom that tries to overcome and complement the by now canonical trinity of negative, positive and social freedom. The book has three main goals. Firstly, it tries to reconstruct the positions different scholars assumed in the debate about freedom in Foucault's reception, while defending Foucault against attacks on his work. Secondly, it tries to introduce fundamental philosophical concepts of freedom and differentiate the problems that different readings of Foucault's work can cause for them. Finally, Schubert puts forth his own understanding of "freedom as critique". This concept solves the problems of freedom by reformulating them through the lens of institutional and political theory. The solution is a socio-political theory revolving around institutions permanently instilling reflexive practices into individuals as critical subjectivity (p. 11-26).

Schubert introduces the three paradigmatic understandings of freedom: negative, meaning the absence of external coercion; positive, being the ability to reflect one's own "true" wishes and needs; and social freedom, which can only be realised in social interaction. He also identifies two main problems arising for those concepts in the reception of Foucault. Firstly, the problem of power determination: With Foucault's analysis of all-encompassing power structures, there is no room outside of power, i.e., there is no place without coercion resulting in an absence of (negative) freedom. Secondly, the problem of subjectivation, which arises out of the more radical reading of Foucault's analysis of the

subject and the social determination of subjective wishes, needs, beliefs and motivations. This results in the absence of (positive) freedom since the subject is not able to reflect on its "natural", "real" or "pre-social" identity (p. 39-49). Schubert then identifies four paradigms in the reception and interpretation of Foucault and systematically develops them in conjunction with the positions of four different authors.

"Foucault is coherent": The first paradigm is developed through an interpretation of Paul Patton's defence of Foucault against Charles Taylor's critique of his works. Taylor had attacked Foucault for his negative conception of freedom, being solely based on the abstinence of power. Foucault's analysis of all penetrating and ever present power structures, Taylor argued, had left no room for freedom with his alleged negative conception of it. Patton defends Foucault by clarifying that, just like Taylor, Foucault actually has a positive or reflexive understanding of freedom, and that the main problem of Taylor's analysis is a missing differentiation of power and domination. Patton argues that Foucault always implied a concept of positive freedom and later clarified it, for example, in his text "Subject and Power". Patton understands freedom in the Foucauldian sense as the ability to criticise the effects of power. This opens up the possibility to reflect on one's own relatedness to unescapable power structures. By proving Foucault has a positive understanding of freedom, Patton resolves the problem posed by Taylor (p. 49-56). The problem of "power determination" is solved. However, simply changing the analytical definition of freedom to a positive one does not solve the problem of subjectivation (p. 56-61).

"Foucault corrects himself": is the second paradigm Schubert develops by a close reading of Thomas Lemke's work. Lemke shares the "rational core" (p. 72) of Taylors critique, thereby supporting the notion that Foucault's concept of discipline lacks an understanding of freedom. For Lemke, Foucault does develop a coherent strategy in his later works through the concept of "Government", which enables Foucault to include macro-phenomena of power, such as the state, laws, etc., into his analysis that were previously excluded by the focus on the "microphysics of power". Lemke understands those structures of power as always being present, influencing the subjects and their understandings of themselves, while not determining their actions (p. 89-111). According to Lemke, the "problem of power determination" is solved by Foucault himself in his essay "Subject and Power" through the differentiation of power and domination. Government is the strategic power structure creating subjects in the first place and only giving incentives to act in one way or another. Freedom is just the other side of the coin and is defined as the ability to act differently in any given situation against the incentives. Domination, however, determines the actions of subjects, therefore not influencing them with power but with coercion, something that has nothing to do with the question of freedom anymore. But government and power are not the only form of influencing/creating subjects. Lemke finds a solution for the problem of subjectivation in Foucault's works on ethics; mainly the II. and III. part of the "history of sexuality". By understanding technologies of the self as subjectivation, Lemke develops the idea of a resistant subjectivity that is always self-subjecting against the influence of the bigger power structures (p. 112-127). Just as with Patton, for Schubert this argument does not hold up. The Subject would need a moment of reflection,

free of power incentives and governmentality, to determine its *own* goals, views and needs. However, Lemke's theory of power and government precisely argues for the immanence of government, always being present and subjectivating, leaving neither time nor room without this influence on the subject. The problem of subjectivation is solved mechanically by the possibility of subjects to influence themselves via technologies of the self, although not substantially since the needs and goals of the subject would already be radically defined in accordance with the power structures governing it (p. 169-171). Schubert calls this an ontological "Kurzschluss" (p. 19), which is German for two terms: a logical fallacy and an electrical short-circuit.

"Foucault criticizes coherently": This is the third paradigm in the debate on Foucault's understanding of freedom. Martin Saar's concept of "genealogy as critique", as developed in his dissertation, tries to bypass Lemke's problem of the ontological "Kurzschluss" altogether. For Saar, Foucault's works are not trying to formulate a coherent theory of the subject or its constitution through power. Instead, Foucault's radical and "dramatic" (p. 177) descriptions of these concepts work as moments of critique, while using their affective character to evoke a moment of reflection in the subjects (p. 173-203). In this understanding, Foucault's works are not solving the socio-philosophical problem of absolute subjectivation by governmentality, discourses and normative power structures. They are themselves actively inciting an emotional response of the subjects to these structures, thereby creating possibilities for a critique of the power dependent processes of subjectivation. Where Patton and Lemke tried to find a socio-philosophical solution to a sociologist or social-theorist Foucault, Saar introduces a new perspective by solving the problem of power determination with an understanding of Foucault as a rhetorical and dramatic critic of the effects of power. The problem of subjectivation cannot be solved with his genealogical critique, because a subject can only be genealogically affected to incite critique if it is at least already partly free. Saar's work implies a fluidity of power and freedom and, as Schubert works out, necessarily opens up the theory since his solution does not apply to the field of social theory. "Either one pursues genealogical criticism, but then the social theoretical statements are subordinated to the mode of criticism, or one pursues the socio-theoretical problems independently. Then the mode of genealogy as a form of critique needs to be discarded in favor of classical political theory, which works with normative differentiations of political and social institutions. Thus, in retrospect, the problems that were worked out in Lemke's approach could be explained. He tries to do social theory while remaining faithful to Foucault's method of genealogy, especially its anti-normativity, and rejects scientifically based political criticism" (p. 248). Developing this political theory is the goal of the final two chapters.

"Foucault is not enough" is the forth analytical framework by Amy Allen, who states that the problem of freedom simply cannot be solved with Foucault's works alone as the three previous paradigms postulated. Her solution consists of a connection between Foucault's critique and analysis of power and Habermas' normative theory. For her, the Foucauldian problem of power determination stems from the lack of differentiation between power structures defined by repression and power structures defined by recognition.

While Foucault helps to understand the repressive side of power, he provides no insights into normativity and universality. Habermas can fill this gap, but he lacks the deep understanding of the influence that power has in the formation of subjectivity. A "contextualised universality" is the common ground between both thinkers, Allen makes out (p. 267-277). Critical subjectivity is a guarantee of freedom for her, but Schubert identifies two shortcomings of her work. Firstly, Allen understands freedom as a universal value of modern society that is universally understood and acknowledged. As Lemke's analysis of neoliberal governmentality shows, this erroneously skips the problem of subjectivation in the name of freedom itself (p. 277-283). Secondly, she sees the possibility of critical subjectivation in social movements, especially liberal ones like queer, feminist, and anti-capitalist struggles. Through this, she falls back behind the already established postfundamentalist understandings of normativity and the immanent uncertainty of any normative regime (p. 283-294). Therefore, a more specific concept of freedom is necessary. One that works as a moral institution – enabling subjects to criticise any form of subjectivation, regardless of normative implications and political project.

Freedom as critique is a dialectical and reflexive concept able to achieve this. While subjects are inherently formed by the power structures surrounding them, institutions can instil a critical potential in them. And since institutions are inherently formed by subjects, a reflexive relation between both sides can be the basis of a political theory. This concept of freedom is able to transcend both the anarchist tendencies of postfundamentalist theories and liberal institutionalism's naive normativity stemming from its missing understanding of subjectivation through power. "This means that the solution to the problem of subjectivation can be found in a postfundamentalist pluralist theory of democracy. In this context, the liberal distinction between moral-universal institutions and particular political-ethical projects is not abandoned, but is processed in a way that is critical of power and tradition" (p. 25).

Overall, Schubert's work achieves its initial goals. It recreates and systematizes the debate on freedom in Foucault's work, while also providing insights into the defensive positions of Patton, Lemke, Saar and Allen. It also develops a fourth, reflexive and dialectical concept of freedom as critique and sets up a multitude of possible connections to institutional political theory and radical democracy. If the problem of an ontological "Kurzschluss" and absolute subjectivation without any predetermined potential of reflection, and therefore the possibility of resistant subjectivity, is actually what Foucault believed in, can be called into question and perhaps even rejected with regard to "Subject and Power", as well as the positions of Lemke, Saar and Allen. But defending Foucault against even the most radical readings of his works is an important socio-philosophical exercise that opens up possibilities for postfundamentalist political theory in general. "Freiheit als Kritik" proposes an original argument that may be even more relevant to the bigger picture surrounding the postmodern notion of blurring the lines between subject and object than to Foucault himself. Everyone interested in Foucault, the contestation of modern universality by "postmodern" philosophy or contemporary political theory in general – preferably all of these topics – will benefit immensely from Schubert's insights. Especially his

meticulousness in the footnotes, which give a lot of context outside the dominant line of argumentation and offer valuable insights into the contemporary academic discourse and reception of Foucault's works.

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