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Genealogy as an Ethic of Self-determination: Husserl and Foucault

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ABSTRACT. The way in which Foucault confronts Husserl helps to highlight the instance that drives Foucauldian research and its current legacy. Foucault inscribes his work through Husserl within a broader tradition, namely, that of the critical thinking that has crossed all of modernity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and up to phenomenology. His main legacy can be identified precisely in the way he relaunches and radicalises this tradition by intensifying its critical gaze.

We will follow the steps of *The Crisis of European Sciences* to evoke the underlying purposes of Husserl's work, showing how his genealogical analysis of scientific knowledge, as a mix of historically determined practices, is guided by the ethical aim of self-determination. Later we will show how Foucault takes up this instance in a completely original way, and we will analyse which analogies and differences can be traced between the two authors' approaches to the problem of an individual's self-determination in his relationship with the network of knowledge-power in which he is immersed. In fact, both authors consider that there can be no emancipation and self-determination of the individual without a preliminary historical-critical retrospective on knowledge and on the ways in which its contents have been constituted. But this retrospective, which we could define generically as *genealogical* (genetic-phenomenological in Husserl's terms), is played out differently by the two authors and implemented by Foucault with a greater degree of radicalism.

Keywords: Husserl, Foucault, genealogy, self-determination, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Edmund Husserl and Michel Foucault are two philosophers with very different styles and methods and who discussed very different topics. As is known, the former never explicitly addressed the problem of power, which instead constitutes one of the main pursuits of the latter. Yet, Foucauldian reflection on power takes its cue from Husserl's phenomenology. This

is what Foucault himself narrates in an interview recorded in 1975, but published posthumously, in which he traces a path from the last Husserlian research to arrive at the knowledge-power crux.[1] It is, in fact, precisely in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* that the French philosopher first sees the problem of the link between technical-scientific procedures and coercive mechanisms, or between practices of knowledge and devices of subjectification, a question that he will later also find in Nietzsche (in another form, i.e., that of the relationship between the will to truth and the will to power).[2] We will therefore investigate how this Husserlian legacy is brought into play by Foucault, not in order to show an unexpected closeness between two such different authors but because we believe that the way in which Foucault confronts Husserl – sometimes explicitly, sometimes more implicitly – helps to highlight the purpose that drives Foucauldian research and its current legacy. As we will see, in fact, Foucault inscribes his work through Husserl within a broader tradition, i.e., the critical thinking that has crossed all of modernity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and up to phenomenology. His main legacy can be identified precisely in the way he relaunches and radicalises this tradition by intensifying its critical gaze.

We will then follow the steps of *The Crisis of European Sciences* to evoke the underlying purposes of Husserl's work, showing how his genealogical analysis of scientific knowledge, as a mix of historically determined practices, is guided by the ethical purpose of self-determination. Later, we will show how Foucault takes up this instance in a completely original way, and we will analyse which analogies and differences can be traced between the two authors' approaches to the problem of an individual's self-determination in his relationship with the network of knowledge-power in which he is immersed. In fact, both authors consider that there can be no emancipation and self-determination of the individual without a preliminary historical-critical retrospective on knowledge and on the ways in which its contents have been constituted. But this retrospective, which we could define generically as *genealogical* (genetic-phenomenological in Husserl's terms), is played out differently by the two authors and implemented by Foucault with a greater degree of radicalism. In fact, he comes to think of the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental as a mixture, and this leads him to radicalise the problem of the historicity of knowledge by questioning some assumptions that remain unexamined in the Husserlian approach. This greater radicalism – exercised in relation to the historicity of the practices of knowledge – is achieved by Foucault, as we will see later, thanks to the contribution of Nietzschean thought and the comparison with structuralism, which allow him to broaden the critical gaze on rational and scientific knowledge, thereby further highlighting the intersection with power and the effects of subjectification that follow. Consequently, the ethic of self-determination, which inspires the work of both philosophers,

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[1] Michel Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault. Propos recueillis par Roger-Pol Droit," *Le Point* 1659 (2004), now available on the website as "Nouveau millénaire, Défis libertaires" on http://1libertaire.free.fr/Foucault40.html (accessed September 28, 2023).

[2] Foucault's phenomenological training dates back to the second half of the 1940s (when he began to follow the seminars held by Merleau-Ponty at the École Normale Superieure), while Nietzsche readings did not take place until 1953 (see Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault (1962-1984)* (1989)), and these were through the work of Heidegger: "I probably wouldn't have read Nietzsche if I hadn't read Heidegger" (Michel Foucault, "The Return of Morality" [1984], in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)* (1996), 470).

is also formulated in a different way: in Foucault it is aimed at a deep historicization and questioning of knowledge and, therefore, at a more profound desubjectification as an exercise prior to a resubjectification (or self-determination). And it is precisely the greater radicalism in the critical approach (and therefore the greater depth of the resubjectification that follows) that perhaps consists in of one of the most important legacies of the French philosopher's work: genealogical analyses of the feminist and queer matrix of the relations between the sexes (as well as between sex and gender) and critical investigations in the context of post-colonial studies owe much to this radical view.

THE CRISIS OF THE SCIENCES

Among Husserl's works, *The Crisis of European Sciences* is probably the best known, but, to clarify how it articulates the relationship between technical-scientific procedures and subjectification, it is best to briefly recall its contents, starting from the word that stands out in the title: crisis. This returns twice in the title of the first part of the work, which reports the conferences held in Prague in 1935: *The Crisis of the Sciences as Expression of the Radical Life-Crisis of European Humanity*. The crisis referred to does not concern the practical successes of the sciences, Husserl clarifies here, but their methodical foundation. Sciences have a method, whose rigour is beyond question, but not a foundation that justifies it, so the ultimate meaning of their own practice is obscure. The purpose and tasks that guide scientific research as a whole have therefore lost their evidence and rationality.

From its origins, writes Husserl, philosophical-scientific inquiry, through rational criticism and research, intended to address fundamental problems: "questions of the meaning or meaninglessness of the whole of this human existence".[3] However, on these final questions, as it has been configured today, "this science has nothing to say to us".[4]

In fact, the author asks, can science think of giving answers about being if, by methodological principle, it addresses itself exclusively to the entity? In other words, can science think of giving answers to questions of meaning, if questions of meaning are actually eliminated a priori from its field of research? In fact, the scientist, when working in his own laboratory, is careful not to deal with metaphysical discourses on "meaning" and "being", and his rigour and the guarantee of his scientificity and professionalism consist in this methodical disinterest. He looks only at the facts. It is a professionalism that makes science more powerful but also deeply meaningless. "Merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people",[5] wrote Husserl.

But questions of meaning have not always been banned from the realm of science, observes the father of phenomenology. This "change" took place at the end of the nineteenth century: sciences lost contact with what they "had meant and could mean for human existence".[6] As is known, for Husserl the cause of this "change" lies in specialisation: in the contemporary age, sciences have begun to focus more and more on specific problems, internal to their specialised

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[3] Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* [1959] (1970), 6.

[4] *Ibid*.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*., 5.

sectors, thereby losing sight of the big picture. According to the famous image of the tree of knowledge, illustrated by Descartes in the *Principles of Philosophy*, the sciences are like the branches of a plant held together by a trunk that is made up of physics (in Descartes' time, the most systematic and methodologically organised discipline). But this tree also has its roots in metaphysics as a question about ultimate things. It is to metaphysics – that is, ultimately, to philosophy as a general critical-rational reflection – that modern thought (from Descartes to Pascal and from Spinoza to Leibniz) assigns the most important role: that of giving a foundation and a unity of meaning to all branches of knowledge. However, the level of specialisation achieved today by the individual sciences, Husserl thinks, has created a more technical language and level of expertise that makes dialogue between the various disciplinary areas increasingly difficult. Thus, the tree of knowledge has transformed into a tower of Babel. A common language no longer exists and every goal of shared meaning has disappeared.

This is the crisis: the European sciences are imprisoned by their own practices and by their own specific methodical procedures (which explain the *how*, how to complete a certain task, but not *why* it should be done). Since the branches of knowledge have cut off their roots with positivism, that is, the general (philosophical) question about the overall meaning of reality, science – writes Husserl – has increasingly become a technique ("technoscience", as we say today); a mere application of rules and procedures and completely blind to the great questions of the world and human life.

In the 1930s, Husserl was concerned about the relationship between science and life, i.e., between technical-rational procedures and human existence. The relationship of subordination of the first to the second seems to have reversed: it is now the second that is subordinated to the first.

The attention that the father of phenomenology addresses precisely to the human being is striking in these pages: "man as a free, self-determining being in his behaviour toward the human and extrahuman surrounding world and free in regard to his capacities for rationally shaping himself and his surrounding world";[7] man "given over in our unhappy times to the most portentous upheavals",[8] meaning "the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity"[9] and to which today's sciences are unable not only to give an answer but also to listen and welcome the questions.

This humanistic rhetoric had to appear rather original to those who, in the previous thirty years, had been trained in Husserlian texts and therefore accustomed to the formal language of phenomenology and to the style, always very rigorous and controlled, of its founder. But it is perhaps precisely during these conferences that Husserl, now elderly, describes the profound reasons that have moved all his philosophical pursuits with an unexpected *pathos*. If his phenomenological analyses have always been dictated by the need for clarity (in the *Idea of Phenomenology*, the phenomenological attitude is defined as a "pure view" focused on the "full clarity offered to the view"), it is in these conferences that he shows the need that animated them: to bring the fundamental problems of man to light; the problem of sense, or nonsense, of human existence, as we have read.

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[7] *Ibid.*, 6.
[8] *Ibid*.
[9] *Ibid*.

This concern for man – and for a science that should be at the service of human life but that seems to have forgotten its original purpose – could rightly make us speak of "Husserlian humanism", something apparently opposed to Foucauldian "anti-humanism". And, if there were doubts, in the very next pages, the author explicitly mentions, with regard to the intention that had inspired modern science at its dawn, the ideals of humanistic-Renaissance culture. These are instances that he seems to want to revive and update so that the European philosophical-scientific design does not definitively die out under the ashes of its own crisis. In fact, despite the profound differences, Husserlian humanism and Foucauldian anti-humanism, as we will see, are much less dissonant than they may seem.

SELF-DETERMINATION

In *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl evokes the revolution put in place by humanism and the Renaissance to show how questions of meaning have not always been banned from the realm of science. In fact, a great historical-cultural project was initiated by European humanity at that time which "turns against its previous way of existing – the medieval – and disowns it, seeking to shape itself anew in freedom".[10] Renaissance man intended to emancipate himself from the constraints of authority, creating a new way of thinking and a new way of being and, Husserl wrote, "science could claim significance – indeed, as we know, the major role – in the completely new shaping of European humanity".[11]

At that time, philosophy was understood as an *all-encompassing science*, a science of the totality of being, able to process all reasonable questions in the unity of a theoretical system through an apodictic method and an infinite progress of research. He thus revived the philosophical ideal of self-determination: modern man claimed to constitute himself in the free autonomy of his reason through rational research and criticism. The scientific system was then moved by this ideal and its various ramifications were still embedded in a bigger picture of meaning. Neither Kepler, nor Newton, nor Leibniz dreamed of being able to keep the problems of physics or mathematics separate from ethical and metaphysical problems, that is, from an overview of the world and the general questions of human existence. According to this design, in fact, "this means not only that man should be changed ethically [but that] the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew through free reason, through the insights of a universal philosophy".[12]

Guiding man towards his own self-awareness and self-determination: this, according to Husserl, is the heart of the humanistic-renaissance design. In fact, Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* reads: God has not placed a determined nature in humanity, but an indeterminacy, so that man, according to his own will and free will, has the task of self-determination.[13] And we find this humanistic ideal again at the end of the Enlightenment as Kant understood it: man's departure from the state of minority, that is, the ability to use his own intellect and to emancipate himself from any form of subjection. Here we find a possible

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[10] *Ibid.*, 8.

[11] *Ibid.*, 7.

[12] *Ibid.*, 8.

[13] See Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man; On Being and the One; Heptaplus* (1965).

meeting point between the instances that animate Husserl's research and those that guide Foucauldian research: the critical and emancipatory role that Husserl assigns to Renaissance science corresponds to what Foucault assigns to the Enlightenment in his reading of the famous Kantian writing *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*.[14] But the meeting point does not simply lie in the critical approach that, since the time of Socrates, animates philosophy as a project of self-determination through emancipation from the chains of superstition. The way in which Foucault declines this critical approach and the way in which Husserl does it are consonant: both adopt a genealogical approach of knowledge that brings to light the historical stratifications; therefore, they dedicate themselves to a retrospective self-understanding that shows, in the words of Nietzsche, *how we have become what we are*.

A GENEALOGY OF MEANING

How does Husserl intend to relaunch the critical and emancipatory ideal of the Renaissance in the contemporary era in order to come to terms with the crisis in which, in his opinion, European humanity finds itself? In his perspective, self-determination can only be achieved through a self-understanding, that is, an investigation aimed at reconstructing the path with which contemporary humanity (its customs, its knowledge, its sciences), in a mostly passive and unconscious way, has been configured. In very general terms: I must know my past, my origin, the history that has marked and determined me in ways in which I am unaware, in order to be able to reshape myself freely. In Husserl's words: "What is clearly necessary (what else could be of help here?) is that we *reflect back,* in a thorough *historical* and *critical* fashion, in order to provide, *before all decisions,* for a radical self-understanding".[15]

Now, if the European civilization crisis is a crisis of the sciences, then it is a question of retracing, in the first place, the historical stages through which these knowledges have come to constitute themselves in their current conformation, with their work, their discourses, and their objects of knowledge. Here begins that profound historical-genetic examination that is at the heart of the last Husserlian work: a true genealogy of scientific practices and their meaning. Since today's disciplines demonstrate that they have lost their original meaning, it is necessary to minutely reconstruct how this happened through a phenomenological investigation that brings clarity and understanding to the unconscious operations of meaning carried out by science in the modern era. In other words, it is a matter of "reactivating" a forgotten meaning and of bringing to light what has fallen into the shadows.

As is known, in fact, the objects of which science speaks, and which constitute his knowledge, are not realities that exist in themselves for Husserl (according to the ideology of naturalistic objectivity, repeatedly denounced by the author in this and other works). Rather, they are stratifications of meaning whose genesis (e.g., transcendental conditions) must be reconstructed. This genesis has its foundation in a set of intersubjective practices and, ultimately, in what phenomenology calls "transcendental subjectivity". Reconstructing the genesis of the objects of which science speaks therefore means investigating and focusing on

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[14] See Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (1984), 32-50.
[15] Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 17.

(bringing to awareness) the operations (the "intentional acts") carried out by scientists and the stratifications of meaning that these practices have gradually configured.

We find the crux of Husserlian humanism in these pages: the disagreement between technique and human life can only be recomposed through a radical genealogical self-understanding. And without this, there can be no real self-determination in the eyes of the great phenomenologist.

FROM HUSSERL TO FOUCAULT

Self-determination: this is the secret that also animates Michel Foucault's research. As is well-known, his reflection revolves around three closely intertwined points: *knowledge, power* and *subject*. If the being is always involved in a network of knowledge-power that shapes its mentality and behaviours, the Foucauldian design – which repeatedly refers to the Enlightenment, although reinterpreted in a new key[16] – is to interrogate the ways in which the being is constituted in order to emancipate it from the constraints that have oriented and configured it in a certain way.

Like Husserl, the French philosopher also believes it is a question, following Nietzsche, of investigating *how we have become what we are* in order to open other paths that lead to a different constitution of ourselves. And it is precisely from the questions posed by Husserl, in his last work, that Foucault begins to focus on those problematic points that, investigated in a completely original way throughout the years of his philosophical maturity, will end up striking another possible road towards self-determination.

As is well-known, the Parisian philosopher raised his first reflections within the sphere of French phenomenology under the influence of masters such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, whose seminars he began to follow at the École normale supérieure in the second half of the 1940s. Thirty years later, he returned on at least four different occasions to talk about his phenomenological training.[17] On these occasions, he repeatedly emphasised his distance from Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's thought, preferring to cite, as his point of reference, *The Crisis of European Sciences* rather than the two French philosophers' works.[18] As mentioned above, it is precisely in *Krisis* – as Foucault calls it – that he sees the problem of the link between knowledge and power, or between technical-scientific procedures and coercive mechanisms, for the first time. To the question as to whether the emphasis placed on the power effects of

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[16] See Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?".

[17] Notably, in the 1975 interview with Roger-Pol Droit (see Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault"), in the preface (written in 1978) to the English translation of G. Canguilhem's *La connaissance de la vie* (see Michel Foucault, "Introduction par Michel Foucault" [1978], in *Dits et écrits*, III (1994), 429-442), in the 1978 conference *Qu'est-ce que la critique?* (see Michel Foucault, "What is critique?" [1990], in *The Politics of Truth* (1997)) and, again in 1978, in one of the discussions with Duccio Trombadori (see Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 3: Power* (2001), 239-297). But also see Michel Foucault, "How much does it cost to tell the truth?" [1983], in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961-1984)* (1996), 348-362.

[18] "Like almost all those of my generation, I stood between Marxism and phenomenology, except for the phenomenology that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were able to learn and use rather than the phenomenology present in Husserl's 1935-37 text, *The Crisis of European Sciences, Krisis*, as we called it" (Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault").

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different types of knowledge is to be considered as his "discovery", Foucault answers resolutely: "Absolutely not! It is in the trajectory of a whole, in Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* as in Husserl's *Krisis*. The story of the power of truth in a society like ours, this problem has been around for a hundred years".[19]

To understand the role of Husserlian phenomenology, we must therefore go back a "hundred years" and perhaps more: Foucault offers a reconstruction of this "trajectory" in the 1978 conference *What is critique?*.[20] The problem of the relationship between knowledge and power is in fact rooted in the question of *criticism*, understood as "the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth".[21] This critical attitude arose, the author says, around the 15th-16th centuries as a reaction to the multiplication of the arts of government in that period (government of children, the poor, beggars, the family, armies, cities, states, one's body and one's spirit). Faced with growing "governamentalization", the desire for "de-subjectivation" has been asserted since the Renaissance in Europe, which Foucault defines as "a kind of general cultural form, both a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking"[22] that can be found in different contexts and declensions: in the religious field, with the Reformation and the new biblical exegesis; in the legal field, with natural law, which opposes blind and unconditional obedience to the laws of the sovereign to inviolable universal rights; in the scientific field, with the imposition of the principle of certainty over that of authority. This critical attitude, we read in the conference text, initially finds a faithful travelling companion in *ratio*. The alliance will then be sanctioned by Kant: faced with the question of the *Aufklärung* as a departure from the state of minority – a question assimilated by Foucault to his own notion of *criticism*[23] – the Königsberg philosopher poses the learning of knowledge as a preliminary task. The rational investigation of the limits of knowledge is thus promoted as a preliminary and indispensable task for that Enlightenment design that intends to take humanity out of the yoke of authority. After Kant, however, the relationship between *Aufklärung* and rational inquiry "is going to legitimately arouse suspicion or, in any case, more and more sceptical questioning: for what excesses of power, for what governmentalization, all the more impossible to evade as it is reasonably justified, is reason not itself historically responsible?".[24] As a loyal ally of criticism, reason finds itself on the stand. In fact, in the nineteenth century, it became that instrumental

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[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Regarding Foucault's phenomenological interpretation, see the debate between Colin Koopman, Kevin Thompson and Colin McQuillan (Colin Koopman, "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages," *Foucault Studies* 8 (2010), 100-121; Kevin Thompson, "Response to Colin Koopman's 'Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages'," *Foucault Studies* 8 (2010), 122-128; Colin Koopman, "Historical Conditions or Transcendental Conditions: Response to Kevin Thompson's Response," *Foucault Studies* 8 (2010), 129-135; Colin McQuillan, "Transcendental Philosophy and Critical Philosophy in Kant and Foucault: Response to Colin," *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010), 145-155; Colin Koopman, "Appropriation and Permission in the History of Philosophy: Response to McQuillan," *Foucault Studies* 9 (2010), 156-164).

[21] Foucault, "What is critique?," 32.

[22] *Ibid.*, 29.

[23] Cfr. *Ibid.*, 34.

[24] *Ibid.*, 37-38.

rationality, that capillary power of planning, of global administration and social and economic control of which Foucault, in other works, already traces the premises in the modern age (*âge classique*). It is at this point in the conference that he cites Husserl, and phenomenology enters the scene.

Starting from the Hegelian left, in fact – according to this reconstruction of the increasingly distrustful relations between rationality and *Aufklärung* – a critical tradition develops in Germany towards positivism, objectivity and technicality which proves not to be a secondary stage in phenomenological reflection: "we should recall that Husserl, in 1936, referred the contemporary crisis of European humanity to something that involved the relationships between knowledge and technique, from *episteme* to *techne*".[25] The reference is yet again to *Krisis*. A text that, Foucault states on another occasion, "called into question the entire system of knowledge of which Europe was the fulcrum, the principle, the engine and thanks to which it had been both liberated and imprisoned".[26]

While reading *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Foucault seems to be affected by the ambiguous face of rationality that emerges from those pages: "reason as both despotism and enlightenment", in the words of his last writing.[27] Through that system of rational knowledge, European humanity, as he says, is *liberated*: reason is the weapon wielded in battle, cultural and political, and evoked in the Krisis and consumed in the modern age against the violence and dogmatism of constituted power. Humanity is liberated but also *imprisoned* because it is in a crisis; the one that Husserl's text attributes to senseless technical procedures that reduces scientific knowledge to a blind mechanism. The author of *What is critique?* certainly had that Husserlian examination in mind when he held the 1978 conference.

At the beginning of his philosophical training, he therefore finds a radical question in *Krisis* that calls into question Western knowledge and the role of reason and the sciences, starting with an investigation of their conditions of possibility. As an example, in these pages Husserl writes that we must first reflect on the fact "that science in general is a human accomplishment, an accomplishment of human beings who find themselves in the world, the world of general experience, [and that it is] one among other types of practical accomplishments which is aimed at spiritual structures of a certain sort called theoretical".[28] This stratification of knowledge on the world of experience already given (the *Lebenswelt*) is the field of investigation on which the father of phenomenology's last examination unfolds: where does science take root, how does objectivity arise and how does the theoretical-scientific attitude originate? These questions, from which Husserl proceeds, are not so different from those that his best student, Heidegger (assiduously studied by Foucault a few years later), poses throughout his pursuits (which, as is known, has other important and complementary pieces in the question of technique, the limits of science and procedural rationality). And it is from these phenomenological questions, and from the historicizing view that they turn to scientific knowledge, showing its roots in human practice ("human, all too human", Nietzsche would say), that

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[25] *Ibid.*, 39.

[26] Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault".

[27] Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science" [1985], in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. J. Faubion (1998), 470.

[28] Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 118.

Foucault begins to pose the problem of the historical origin of reason and its coercive mechanisms. In *Krisis*, as he recounts, recalling the years spent reading and commenting on that text, "ultimately we wondered what that knowledge and that rationality were, so deeply linked to our destiny, deeply linked to so many powers, and so powerless in the face of History. And the humanities were evidently objects that were called into question by this process. So this was my first stutter. What are the humanities? Starting from what are they possible? How was it possible to form similar discussions and set similar goals for oneself? I resumed these questions while trying to get rid of Husserl's philosophical framework".[29]

We will see what framework the French philosopher intends to get rid of, but let us first take a look at the Husserlian instances that he makes his own. The genealogical approach that characterises this work and that has more than an assonance with what he calls *criticism* is what interests Foucault in *Krisis*; not only because it is a question, as always in the phenomenological method, of putting out of play (*ausser Spiel zu setzen*, in Husserl's words) what is considered true, to ask for the origin and the ground of rooting, questioning knowledge in its conditions of onset and in its effects (questioning the "games of truth", Foucault would say, or the "politics of truth" that have allowed a given content to impose itself as true) but also because it is an unprecedented ground of rooting that Husserl traces in his genealogy of scientific rationality.

If in general the Husserlian phenomenological design aims to trace the origin of meaning in transcendental conditions, this origin is increasingly traced back to its historical-concrete conditions precisely in *Krisis*. This is an aspect of the 1936 work that undoubtedly attracted Foucault's attention. The best known example is offered by *Appendix VI*, where the genesis of geometry and its ideal objectivities, characterised by their being free from all empirical factuality, are found in language and writing: if they had never been "said" and "written", such ideals could never have arisen on the horizon.[30] The ideal purity of meaning (which characterises geometric objects, such as objectivity in general) can only be constituted, notes the phenomenologist, through its "incarnation" in the voice and body of writing, i.e., in historically determined empirical conditions. In this appendix, as famous as *The Origin of Geometry*, the author of *Krisis* therefore shows how not only the contents of knowledge (the specific determinations of meaning) but the transcendental conditions themselves are subject to empirical influences. These and other glimpses open up in Husserl's work like flashes of lightning that portend a storm. Towards the end of his philosophical career, as has been noted, Husserl finds himself "engaged in a radicalization and in some way an impressive, tormented actualisation of his transcendentalism".[31]

Krisis therefore announces, albeit in a problematic and tormented way, that contamination of the empirical and transcendental, that mixture of the conditions of meaning with the historicity of its concrete manifestation, which is the figure of the Foucauldian genealogical process.[32] It is no coincidence that the notion of *historical a priori* that will become, albeit

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[29] Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault".

[30] See Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences,* 353-78.

[31] Federico Leoni, *Senso e crisi. Del corpo, del mondo, del ritmo* (2005), 54.

[32] Many authors, albeit from different perspectives, agree on the interweaving of the empirical and transcendental as the architrave of Foucauldian thought, see for example: Béatrice Han, *Foucault's Critical Project:*

reformulated under different assumptions, central to Foucault's thought appears precisely in the pages of *The Origin of Geometry*.[33] Husserl uses this term to indicate an invariant transcendental condition (*historical a priori*). But there is a radicalism in the text that resounds on the term and seems to make it resonate in exactly the opposite sense, that is, as an *a priori* that varies from age to age (*historical* in the sense of *historically determined*). The disturbance that echoes there invests the purity of the *a priori* that, subtracted from its supratemporal dwelling, would find itself thrown into becoming (as was already the case in Hegel, unlike Kant). It is in this sense that Foucault uses the Husserlian expression, twisting it in a direction that is already potentially present in *Krisis*, if only in the form of an ambiguity that has never been definitively dissolved.[34] Foucault's twist is contemporary to Derrida's operation. Derrida moved in the same direction as Foucault and caused Husserl's ambiguity in the light of day.[35] At the beginning of the sixties, what was only obscured in Husserl had now been acquired for both of them: the a priori conditions emerge from the historical evolution of empirical elements that, in their stratification and sedimentation, generate new openings of meaning. These conditions are therefore subject to a process of transformation: there is no constituent point of view that is not also constituted (i.e., that is not involved in the very process of constituting meaning).

And it is precisely the historicity of the *a priori*, the fact that the conditions of possibility of scientific reason are rooted in historically determined practices, that casts the shadow of doubt on the universality of that system of knowledge constituted by Western sciences. In short, reading *Krisis* raises a suspicion – on which the entire Foucauldian "archaeology of knowledge" will fuel – that rational knowledge has imposed itself on the entire West without

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Between the Transcendental and the Historical (2002); Kevin Thompson, "Historicity and Transcendentality: Foucault, Cavaillès, and the Phenomenology of the Concept," *History and Theory* 47:1 (2008); Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (2005); Rudi Visker, *Genealogy as Critique* (1995).

[33] In the Husserlian text we find first the expression "concrete, historical a priori" (Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 372) and then simply "historical a priori". Foucault reworked this Husserlian expression, first using, in 1959, the term "concrete a priori" and "historical and concrete a priori" (see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963)), and later, in all subsequent works, simply "historical a priori".

[34] On Husserl's ambiguities, see Roberto Terzi, *Il tempo del mondo. Husserl, Heidegger, Patočka* (2009). In her book, *Michel Foucault e la Daseinanalyse*, Elisabetta Basso emphasises the differences between Foucault and Husserl in the use of the term historical a priori: the former uses this expression within a horizon completely drained of teleologism and foundationalism that characterise the Husserlian approach and that resonate in the notions of "tradition" and "continuity" found in *Krisis* (see Elisabetta Basso, *Michel Foucault e la Daseinanalyse. Un'indagine metodologica* (2007), 149-172). In marking the differences, however, the author leaves an aspect in the shadows that in my opinion is essential: the theme of a contamination between the empirical and transcendental – the true fulcrum of the Foucauldian notion of *historical a priori* – already crosses the *Krisis* like a karst river that other authors, in their works, will later bring to the surface. This is the case of Foucault, in fact, as well as of Derrida and Patočka. The latter two engaged in a more explicit comparison with the Husserlian legacy (on the contamination between empirical and transcendental in Patočka see Terzi, *Il tempo del mondo*, 165-255).

[35] See Jacques Derrida, *Introduction à 'L'origine de la géométrie' de Edmund Husserl* (1962). At the beginning of 1963, Foucault had already read this text, as proven by a letter – written to Derrida on January 27 of that year – in which he expresses appreciation for his work (see Foucault's letter to Derrida dated January 27, 1963 published in: Marie-Louise Mallet and Ginette Michaud, ed., *Derrida* (2004), 109-110).

having its papers in order, and that its necessity and its truths are more *de facto* coercive (due to contingent historical circumstances) than *de jure* (due to their universal and eternal value). On the other hand, in those pages, it is Husserl himself who raises the doubt with which the entirety of European rationality and its civilisation are suspended on the edge of the abyss: at a certain point, the author wonders whether they have a foundation that is not merely historical-empirical or whether they are, instead, completely contingent and therefore completely meaningless.[36] He wonders about it in an attempt to avoid the chasm of historicity where everything seems to be swallowed up within a bottomless abyss. This is an extreme challenge, and, although aware of the difficulties, he is confident there is a possible way out. But, Foucault observes, "something was about to collapse, around Husserl, around that speech to which the German school, for so many years, had devoted great energy".[37] Foucault reads *Krisis* now aware of the inevitability of the abyss.

Here, then, is the question of the coercive mechanisms inherent in rationalisation: the knowledge of *ratio* and its contents, although they are relative as they are rooted in empirical and historically determined conditions, spread globally with a power whose legitimacy is questionable. At the base of this system of knowledge, there is only its contingency ("its arbitrary nature in terms of knowledge, its violence in terms of power").[38]

What was a theoretical doubt in Husserl explodes in a political question with Foucault: if Western knowledge is contingent and arbitrary, its presumed necessity and universality is nothing more than coercion. The problem of the radical historicity of reason thus solves itself with that of *Aufklärung*, of the emancipation from power. The legacy of phenomenology, which questions the conditions of possibility of meaning, and therefore also of scientific-rational knowledge and its actual establishment in the field of practices, has in fact played, according to the reconstruction of *What is critique?*, a decisive role in the recurrence of the question of *criticism*:

> the question of what the *Aufklärung* is has returned to us through phenomenology and the problems it raised. Actually, it has come back to us through the question of meaning and what can constitute meaning. How it is that meaning could be had out of nonsense? How does meaning occur? This is a question which clearly is the complement to another: how is it that the great movement of rationalization has led us to so much noise, so much furor, so much silence and so many sad mechanisms? After all, we shouldn't forget that *La Nausée* is more or less contemporaneous with the *Krisis.* And it is through the analysis, after the war, of the following, that meaning is being solely constituted by systems of constraints characteristic of the signifying machinery. It seems to me that it is through the analysis of this fact

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[36] In fact, the phenomenologist writes that we must understand "whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like "China" or "India"" and "whether the spectacle of the Europeanization of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than to a historical non-sense, of the world" (Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 16). In other words, it is a matter of understanding whether our entire now global Western culture makes any sense at all or is the mere result, transiently, of a roll of the dice.

[37] Foucault, "Les confessions de Michel Foucault".

[38] "What is critique?," 54.

whereby meaning only exists through the effects of coercion which are specific to these structures that, by a strange shortcut, the problem between *ratio* and *power* was rediscovered.[39]

This problem, Foucault continues, then intersects epistemological research and the complications of the history of science (those of Cavaillès, Bachelard, Canguilhelm), which are also linked to a certain phenomenological background: "the historical problem of the historicity of the sciences has some relationships to and analogies with and echoes, to some degree, this problem of the constitution of meaning. How is this rationality born? How is it formed from something which is totally different from it? There we have the reciprocal and inverse problem of that of the *Aufklärung*: how is it that rationalization leads to the furor of power?".[40]

What is critique? thus draws a large fresco, tracing the history of a movement, that of *criticism*, which arose in the Renaissance age and flourished in the century of enlightenment, finding new life in the contemporary era, coming, through the instances of phenomenology, to doubt the same reason and therefore to question the entire system of Western knowledge. In fact, this critical desire finds in scientific rationality – but, more generally, in the same methods of constituting meaning – a historical contingency that imposes itself through coercive mechanisms (coercive because *arbitrary* and arbitrary because *historically determined*), which are all the more hidden the more that reason and knowledge cloak themselves in noble ideals.

In this regard, Foucault did nothing but draw the coherent consequences of that crisis of the *logos* spotted by Husserl and already perceived by Heidegger, further radicalising its scope: the absence of a terrain that escapes historicity overwhelms the discourse of the West and removes the foundation (supposedly universal and timeless) of every institution, be it scientific, legal, economic or political. Now, is this not just the terrain, cleared by Husserl then ploughed by Foucault, on which queer studies and post-colonial studies will flourish? Contemporary debates in these areas move, in fact, from the historicity – and therefore from the non-universality and non-neutrality – of Western rational knowledge, relaunching the Foucauldian critical instance and taking it to unexplored terrains. And just as Foucault brought the exercise of reason's self-criticism, begun by Husserl, to the point of questioning some assumptions of the same Husserlian approach, in the same way queer and post-colonial studies have further radicalised Foucault's critical exercise to the point of questioning some assumptions of the same Foucauldian approach.[41] If there has been a gradual departure on this line of research, first from Husserl and then from Foucault, it is not due to complete otherness and

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[39] *Ibid.*, 41-42.

[40] *Ibid.*, 42.

[41] See, for example, Judith Butler's criticisms of Foucault in Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997). Regarding post-colonial studies, for example, Thijs Willaert writes: "Adopting a phrase from Dipesh Chakrabarty, one can say that postcolonial studies has been 'provincializing Foucault.' Pointing out the Eurocentric tendencies in Foucault's work, postcolonial scholars have demonstrated how his account of various rationales of power disregards the key role the colonies have played in the production and development of discipline, biopolitics and governmentality. The argument that Foucault produces a self-contained history of Europe has been repeatedly articulated in the work of Mitchell, Kaplan, Spivak, Stoler, Mbembe, and Duncan, and it also follows from Scott's decision to look at colonial governmentality as a counterpart to the governmentality Foucault describes" (Thijs Willaert, *Postcolonial Studies After Foucault: Discourse, Discipline, Biopower, and Governmentality as Travelling Concepts* (2012), 191).

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total dissent with respect to their approach but rather to the need to radicalise and intensify their critical and emancipatory instance.

FOUCAULDIAN ANTI-HUMANISM

What does Foucault question about the Husserlian approach, beyond the obvious differences in method? The humanism with which Husserlian thought is impregnated is certainly remarkable. However, here we must clarify the points of divergence in this regard and then find a certain consistency in the background in relation to an ethic of self-determination.

Let us start by saying that the term "humanism", in Foucault's words, indicates, as already for Althusser, a sort of creeping ideology which permeated the culture of the time, mixed with a whole series of theoretical assumptions ("continuity", "historicism", "transcendental subjectivity") that, starting from the 1950s, began to fall under the blows of the *Nietzsche Renaissance* and structuralism. What is in doubt is the consideration of history as a continuous process of growth and of man as a conscious agent of this process.

The reference to Nietzsche is essential here to understand the perspective from which Foucault moves in his differences with respect to the horizon in which Husserl works. Based on Nietzsche, in fact, the French philosopher rejects, from the Husserlian approach, both teleologism and foundationalism, and, consequently, the notions of "tradition" and "continuity" on which they rest.[42] According to the author of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the basis of such notions is still the idea of a founder: there is "tradition" and "continuity" only for a panoramic view that summarises the entire historical development.[43] For this reason, he insists, in the 1969 work as in *The Order of Things*, on the discontinuity that characterises the emergence of new aspects of knowledge: the threshold from which new empirical contents manifest implies a "break" with respect to the previously existing order which cannot be healed by the clarifying activity of a consciousness, and which cannot be reabsorbed into a dialectical movement or reduced to a "totalisation". His research of the *historical a priori* – that is, of the transcendental conditions from which knowledge is organised, conditions themselves subject to historicity – therefore has no "constructive" or "reconstructive" intentions, as is the case in Husserl. The objective is rather to show the historical genesis of empirical contents with "critical" purposes

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[42] For Foucault, the notion of "continuity", in particular, is linked to a whole series of other notions ("tradition", "influence", "development", "teleology", "mentality") that constitute a set of assumptions from which he intends to distance himself, as he clarifies in a 1968 paper (see Michel Foucault, "On the archaeology of the sciences: response to the epistemology circle" [1968], in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. J. Faubion (1998), 297-333).

[43] In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, we read: "Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject — in the form of historical consciousness — will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, and find in them what might be called his abode. Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought" (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), 13).

in the sense indicated by *What is critique?*: it is to show the subject his subjection to certain contents, producing, for this very reason, a "decentralisation" from them.

Moreover, when Foucault published his first works, the cultural climate in France changed profoundly in a structuralist sense. Think of Dumézil, Benveniste, Barthes, Jakobson, Lacan, Levi-Strauss and Althusser himself. All of these are inspired, directly or indirectly, in their research methodology by the principle that guides De Saussure's linguistics: the sign has no attribute except by difference from the entire system of signs in which it is inserted. On this inspiring principle, every single systemic element should be thought of – rather than as an atom endowed with its own uniqueness and subsistence – as a pure differential value, similar in this way to the exchange function of money. Linguistic structuralism, which unites the phonology of Jakobson and the studies of Benveniste, finds its foundations here. Generalised structuralism, which from the 1950s will conquer the human sciences, will extend its validity to all fields of experience: every element (be it a phoneme, a concept, a mythologem, a social function or a political institution) has value (has a specific determination of meaning) only for the differential position it occupies within a network of relationships (the structure). In short, *it is structure that determines meaning*: not man, not the subject, nor some "transcendental subjectivity" of phenomenological descent.[44]

Foucault's "anti-humanism", which incorporates and makes these demands its own, is then a deviation from the philosophical climate in which it was initially formed and, in particular, from some assumptions that he still believes operate in a phenomenological approach. As he recounts in an interview, recalling that caesura that, in the fifties, marked his generation, the transition took place from phenomenology in the direction of structuralism and, essentially, revolved around the problem of language.[45] When French philosophy began to incorporate the linguistics of De Saussure (to whom Merleau-Ponty dedicates his seminars in 1947-48 and 1948-49), it was evident – continues Foucault – "that phenomenology could not do it as much justice as the structural analysis of signification which could be produced by a structure of a linguistic nature, a structure in which the subject in the phenomenological sense could not be engaged as a creator of meaning".[46]

The problem, which leads to a progressive deviation from phenomenology, is therefore the sovereignty of the being, the idea of a "transcendental subjectivity" that gives meaning (this is what Foucault also calls the problem of the "unconscious"[47] with reference to Lacan). In fact, studies on language highlight a wide area of laws and structures (which Foucault calls "systems of constraints characteristic of the signifying machinery",[48] coercive mechanisms of constitution of meaning or even "formal conditions"[49] of its appearance) over which subjectivity has no power of control and from which it is indeed determined.

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[44] See Foucault's thoughts on the subject in Paolo Caruso, *Conversazioni con Lévi-Strauss, Foucault e Lacan* (1969), 107-8.

[45] See Foucault, "How much does it cost to tell the truth?".

[46] *Ibid.*, 350.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] "What is critique?," 41.

[49] Caruso, *Conversazioni*, 94-5.

Starting from this problem, Foucault tells us on another occasion, "we have reviewed the Husserlian idea that there is meaning everywhere, that surrounds us and invests us already before we begin to open our eyes and take the floor. For those of my generation, meaning does not appear on its own, it does not "already exist", or, rather, "already exists", yes, but under a number of conditions that are formal conditions. And from '55 onwards we dedicated ourselves mainly to the analysis of the formal conditions of the appearance of meaning".[50]

DE-SUBJECTIVISING THE TRANSCENDENTAL

If "transcendental" is the term that indicates the conditions of appearance of meaning in philosophy, the need for radicalisation felt by Foucault in those years could then be defined as follows: "de-subjectivising the transcendental". That is, it is necessary to think of the *a priori* (which make possible and determine the experience and knowledge of the subject) not, following Kant, as structures of subjectivity but as something of which the subject – man – is an effect. This is "anti-humanism": man is not the starting point but the end point of a series of processes (techniques, practices and discourses) that run behind him.

Now, this need is not only Foucauldian and cannot be reduced to the French debate of the fifties and sixties. Expanding our horizon, we realise that it is a trajectory traceable throughout the history of contemporary thought.

If the modern age opened with *ego cogito*, placed by Descartes at the foundation of knowledge, and closed with Kant's *I Think*, contemporary thought has instead consummated, and then definitively sanctioned, the divorce between the transcendental and subjectivity. Hegel already removed the *a priori* from the subject and threw becoming into tumult: no longer assimilable to pure categories, fixed in our minds, the conditions of experience are instead determined by history in its changing path. Subsequently, with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, the *a priori* is systematically placed elsewhere from subjective consciousness (in socio-economic relations, in a game of blind forces, and in the mechanisms of the unconscious, respectively).

If there is no doubt that Husserl reintroduces a notion of "subjectivity" as a transcendental horizon, the first and original condition of all truth and every relationship with the world, it is also true that, already in his writings and then throughout twentieth-century phenomenology and its innovators and interlocutors (from Heidegger to Sartre, from Merleau-Ponty to Patočka, up to Derrida), this consciousness quickly empties itself of any subjective reference to become an anonymous and impersonal "transcendental field" (as Deleuze puts it). That is, something that is more in the order of the "event" than of the Ego.

Each of these authors, in their own way, contributed to the progressive split between the subject and transcendental along a non-linear, indeed often bumpy, path. Sartre himself – whom Foucault accuses of "humanism" – in his first writing, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1937), aims directly at the heart of phenomenology, that is, precisely at that notion of transcendental consciousness that constitutes the lintel of the Husserlian system, to expel the Ego and reinterpret this consciousness as a pure, completely impersonal "spontaneity". For Sartre,

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[50] *Ibid.*

the ego is neither the owner nor the foundation of this absolute transcendence: it is, if anything, only a mask.

Read from this standpoint, the humanism/anti-humanism debate, in which Foucault is called into question in contrast to phenomenology and its French reception, seems to be the story of a great misunderstanding. But the first to put it in these terms is Husserl himself: in *Krisis*, he candidly admits that what he means by "Ego" is defined as such "only by equivocation".[51]

And it is precisely on this misunderstanding – in an attempt to come to terms with it and dissolve it definitively – that incredible waves of cross-criticism will be triggered (those of Sartre to Husserl and those of Merleau-Ponty to Sartre in the wake of Heidegger's criticisms of Husserl, as well as those of Heidegger to Sartre, of Husserl to himself and, finally, those of Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault to Sartre), all essentially aimed at detaching the transcendental from any subjectivistic residue.

At times, these cross-criticisms seem marked by excessive mistrust or by real misunderstandings (Sartre does not know the latest developments in Husserlian thought, Merleau-Ponty misunderstands the role of subjectivity in Sartre, of which even Foucault could not have read the last unpublished writings, etc.). But, on the whole, each of them makes a fundamental contribution in a sort of progressive path that leads continental philosophy towards its final destination: if there is a transcendental, it is impregnated with empirical and historically determined elements, that is, it is something like an anonymous practice ("the doing of each and all" as Hegel had already said)[52] within which course our subjectivity is constituted; an anonymous practice, or, to put it with Foucault, an interweaving of "practices" (a term that he takes up, once again, from *The Crisis of European Sciences*).

On the other hand, the fundamental notion of "transcendental subjectivity", a true pivot of phenomenological theory and practice, is neither reducible to the individual psyche nor to Cartesian evidence. In fact, in *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl clarifies in a decisive manner that the constituent subjectivity has an intersubjective structure,[53] and in *Umsturz der koperkanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation*, he explains that this "transcendental intersubjectivity" is based on the *Erfahrungsboden*.[54] Furthermore, phenomenology, if understood, following Husserl, as a way of research, has shown itself to be an open path and able to start over again (*immer wieder*, "always again", as Husserl liked to say) by integrating the criticisms and corrections that have been made to this notion over the years.[55]

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[51] Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*, 184.

[52] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807] (2018), 254.

[53] See, in particular, the Fifth Cartesian Meditation in Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* [1931] (1960).

[54] See Husserl, "Umsturz der koperkanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation" [1934], in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, ed. Marvin Farber (1940).

[55] See Vincenzo Costa, *Il cerchio e l'ellisse. Husserl e il darsi delle cose* (2007).

ETOPOIETICS AS SELF-DETERMINATION

Now, on the one hand, the path of phenomenology could only go in the direction of a transcendental emptied of the reference to a Cartesian subjectivity; on the other, Foucault felt it was perhaps necessary to break with a series of assumptions (which were also beginning to be questioned within phenomenology), but, once riding the "anti-humanistic" (or, if you prefer, "structuralist") wave, he returned to the theme of subjectivity in his last writings.

With the publication of his last book, *The Care of the Self*, in 1984, and, even earlier, with the courses held at the Collège de France in the early 1980s, the perspective of a self-determination of the subject re-emerges. In these last years of his life, Foucault clearly outlines a practice, an *ethos*, aimed at the self-constitution of oneself, effectively baptised *etopoietic*. The idea behind etopoietics is that I am determined as a subject by consolidated relations of power and subjugation, but, once constituted with a certain subjectivity, I can, through a process of "detachment from oneself", transform it, shape it and make it react in ways that also completely change it and that produce a radical resubjectification.

This is the reason why Foucault dedicates himself to the study of Greek and Roman antiquity and ancient philosophy, especially Stoic philosophy. The self-care practiced by the ancients is understood as a series of techniques and exercises. In fact, the word "cure", *epimeleia* in Greek, derives from *melete*, which means "exercise" and "training". These exercises produce a re-subjectification. The spiritual exercises of the Stoics, for example, aim to escape from the enchantment of some mental representations in order to free the subject. The subject is no longer just a passive product of power and knowledge but, by taking care of himself, able to free himself from certain thoughts and certain attitudes, thereby transforming himself.

On the other hand, already in 1978, Foucault clarified how the "death of man" – of which he had spoken in *The Order of Things* and which had earned him the label of "anti-humanist" – should be understood as a possibility of self-determination in these terms: "men have never ceased to construct themselves, that is, to continually displace their subjectivity, to constitute themselves in an infinite, multiple series of different subjectivities that will never have an end and never bring us in the presence of something that would be "man." Men are perpetually engaged in a process that, in constituting objects, at the same displaces man, deforms, transforms, and transfigures him as a subject".[56] Does the echo of the humanist Pico della Mirandola not seem to resonate in these words when he defines man as a being whose nature is never determined once and for all and for whom it is therefore necessary to constitute oneself freely?

CONCLUSIONS

This brief comparison between Husserl and Foucault, while tracing a common background instance, differently translated, certainly does not aim to erase the well-known and profound differences in style and content. As an example: for Foucault, there is no basis to which it is possible to bring back, in a rational and unitary way, all the practices and techniques that have

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[56] Foucault, *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 3: Power*, 276.

gradually outlined a certain way of being subject. Self-determination cannot, therefore, for him pass from a methodical and rigorous knowledge – as elaborated by Husserl, at least in his intentions, through his own phenomenological method—capable of regaining a sense that has been lost and which should be reactivated. The Foucauldian way is outlined more as a "detachment from oneself" (*se déprendre de soi-même*)[57] than as a "finding oneself again".

But there is a singular aspect that unites the two authors and is worth emphasising in conclusion: self-determination necessarily passes through a historical-genealogical retrospection for both. This is a trait that – despite the diversity of method, strategy and even short-term objectives – unites Husserl and Foucault and differentiates them, for example, from Heidegger (and, in some respects, from Derrida's deconstructionism): there is a genealogical propensity in both of them that we do not find in Heidegger because of his distrust in the descriptive possibilities of philosophy.[58] On the other hand, Heidegger's demands – the profound reasons why he does not believe that philosophy can lead to "true discourses", stable and definitive – are not ignored by either Husserl or by Foucault. Instead, they are diversely integrated into their research methodology or, to put it better, into their *style of thinking* (aimed at abandoning the conceptual tools used, in Foucault's case, or always rethinking them from scratch, as in Husserl's). In both, the path of a genealogy is drawn that, without giving up showing how we have become what we are, at the same time avoids falling in love with one's own genealogical descriptions. Hence the need, for both, not to close up shop and keep the question open: *immer wieder*, always again.

It is this confidence in the emancipatory possibilities of critical-philosophical work – a work of continuous interrogation and questioning of assumptions – that is one of the most decisive aspects of Foucault's legacy. His genealogical work as an ethics of self-determination and the greater radicalism of its exercise compared to Husserl's genetic-phenomenological investigation constitute a model that can be translated – and that has been translated – in new ways, relaunching – and sometimes further radicalising – the critical and emancipatory instance. What Foucault bequeaths to us is therefore not a matter of content: his legacy lies not so much in his particular analyses of knowledge and power but in his *modus operandi* and in the exemplary way in which he has been able to combine theoretical radicalism with the demands of ethics, confidently restoring breath and horizon to philosophical inquiry.

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[57] See Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (1984).

[58] This juxtaposition between Foucauldian archaeology and Husserlian phenomenology, due to differences from Heidegger's hermeneutics, is also proposed, albeit critically, by Dreyfus and Rabinow in their book on Foucault: while the first two seem to lack "naivety", in their reliance on philosophical language and its descriptive possibilities, the hermeneutic tradition (from Heidegger onwards) is well aware that each language is historically determined and therefore continuously makes a question of the terms it uses (see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (1982)). This "hermeneutic" awareness is, on the other hand, clearly present in Foucault, who does not hesitate to question his own language and writing by explicitly speaking of "fictions" (see Enrico Redaelli, *L'incanto del dispositivo. Foucault dalla microfisica alla semiotica del potere* (2011), 183-219).

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