Foucault and Hegel: A Theoretical Encounter for Studying Subjectivity and Knowledge in the Contemporary University

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Abstract: This paper brings Foucault and Hegel together in a productive way in the context of examining the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge within the contemporary university. While acknowledging the differences between their intellectual projects, I argue that Foucault's ethical turn and Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit can complement each other in studying subjectivity-constitution. They share a fundamental premise: transforming the subject's being is needed to access the truth. These modifications of the subject's being are carried out by *techniques of the self* (Foucault) or the *path of despair* (Hegel). Drawing on the inseparability of epistemology and ethics, I propose an analytical framework for studying the subjectivity-constitution of the subject of knowledge – scholars, academics or researchers – in the contemporary university. The paper aims to contribute to the study of the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge in the modern university, an area often overlooked in higher education and social studies of science.

Keywords: Foucault, Hegel, subjectivity-constitution, epistemology, ethics, university

Introduction

The contemporary university and ethical life

Living in the contemporary university involves an *ethical disposition*. It is not just critical thinking (epistemology) but also an attitude that is at play when academics produce knowledge – i.e., knowledge production within universities seems to be more than mere curiosity, reflexivity and objectivity and involves an ethical attitude across epistemic cultures. This does not mean the homogenisation of forms of seeing, acting and behaving or the omission of the particularities of epistemic cultures[1] or academic tribes[2] but the existence of an *ethos* that makes ways of thinking and behaving acceptable among academic subjects by the fact that they produce knowledge. Put differently, "while there are evident national and regional characteristics in terms of higher education policy (…) there is a remarkable level of homogeneity in higher education globally."[3] This institutional homogeneity is often called neoliberal when the Western model is analysed. Yet the ethical life emerging from this model cannot simply be reduced to the existence of a neoliberal academic subject. The practices of accommodation and resistance taking place in the contemporary academia are the entanglement of diverse biopolitical mechanisms, e.g., coloniality, decolonisation, whiteness, etc. Beyond these differences, this paper contributes to expanding our conceptual understanding of subjectivity-constitution in academia by avoiding the monolithic notion of "neoliberal subjects."[4]

The acknowledgement of an ethos embedded in knowledge production implies the emergence of a distinctive, contingent and conflicting *form of life* within the contemporary university. Despite the multiplicity of such modes, this assumption leads us to focus on the relationship between *subjectivity* and *knowledge* – i.e., how the constitution and consolidation of a form of life affect knowledge in itself and knowledge production practices. Put differently, if we want to delve into the conditions of contemporary university and

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[1] K. Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[2] Tony Becher and Paul Trowler, *Academic Tribes and Territories: Intellectual Enquiry and the Culture of Disciplines*, 2nd ed (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2001).

[3] Tristan McCowan, 'Desinstitucionalização e Renovação No Ensino Superior', *Educação & Realidade* 46, no. 4 (2021): 2, https://doi.org/10.1590/2175-6236117607.

[4] Michalinos Zembylas, '"Neoliberal Subjects" and "Neoliberal Affects" in Academia: Methodological, Theoretical and Political Implications', *Policy Futures in Education*, 1 November 2022, 14782103221135618, https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103221135618.

academic life, it is crucial to accept the inseparability of ethics, ontology, and epistemology in knowledge production.[5] This inseparability provides a novel perspective for the study of subjectivity and knowledge within the contemporary university beyond epistemic cultures and organisational structures that I want to develop in this paper.

In that respect, exploring how epistemic subjects are constituted is fundamental to understanding the possibility of social and cultural changes within universities. Yet a top-down approach has prevailed, paying too much attention to the structural conditions of knowledge production[6] or epistemic cultures.[7] Similarly, studies on subjectivity-constitution have emphasised the epistemological conditions of knowledge production, e.g., the cultivation and negotiation of epistemic virtues,[8] the relationship between knowledge and action[9] or the emergence of non-human agency.[10] Acknowledging the importance of these accounts, in this paper, I argue instead that the condition for knowledge production to be in effect relies on historical and social practices of the self that affect the way academics relate with themselves, others and knowledge.[11] In other words, ontology, ethics, and epistemology need to be analysed simultaneously within an historical framework. Bringing Foucault and Hegel together might well contribute to this endeavour. The examination of subjectivity-constitution from this perspective is relevant since the practices of accommodation and resistance in academia might well provide

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[5] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[6] Richard Hall, *The Alienated Academic: The Struggle for Autonomy inside the University*, 2018, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1878874.

[7] Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures*.

[8] Herman Paul and Jeroen van Dongen, eds., *Epistemic Virtues in the Sciences and the Humanities*, 1st ed. 2017, Boston Studies in the Philosophy and History of Science 321 (Cham: Springer International Publishing : Imprint: Springer, 2017).

[9] Jana Bacevic, 'Knowing Neoliberalism', *Social Epistemology*, 22 July 2019, 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2019.1638990.

[10] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, 1. publ. in pbk, Clarendon Lectures in Management Studies (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); Jonathan Murdoch, 'Inhuman/Nonhuman/Human: Actor-Network Theory and the Prospects for a Nondualistic and Symmetrical Perspective on Nature and Society', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 15, no. 6 (1 December 1997): 731–56, https://doi.org/10.1068/d150731.

[11] Jana Bacevic, 'Epistemic Injustice and Epistemic Positioning: Towards an Intersectional Political Economy', *Current Sociology* 71, no. 6 (October 2023): 1122–40, https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211057609.

meaningful insights to rethink the university from the constitution of collective subjects or a "political *we*."[12]

Foucault and Hegel: The Inseparability of Epistemology and Ethics

Apparently, profound discrepancies exist between Foucault's and Hegel's intellectual projects. Indeed, in 1963 Foucault himself examined the constitution of a transcendental subject in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* in order to "find the path leading to a non-dialectical thought, purged of the mythology of return."[13] That is, Foucault attempted to distance himself from any form of metaphysical approach and focused on critiquing the existence of a transcendental subject in Hegel's system of thought.

However, Foucault's critical analysis of Hegel needs to be read carefully. As it is well-known, Hegel's reception in France was immensely influenced by Kojeve's reading and interpretation of the Phenomenology of Spirit. Indeed, according to Macherey, "Among this public [Kojeve's lectures], small in number but of rare quality, featured (on the side of people like Breton, Queneau and Lacan) Bataille, whom Foucault had declared later to owe, on the basis of Nietzschean culture, his distancing from Hegelianism."[14] That is to say, although Foucault did not attend Kojeve's lectures on Hegel, he was indirectly influenced by his interpretation. This is problematic since according to one prestigious expert in Hegel, Kojeve "pay[s] almost no attention to the first three chapters"[15] of the Phenomenology of Spirit. In fact, he "writes as if we should isolate the Self-Consciousness chapter as a free-standing philosophical anthropology."[16] This reading and interpretation have been motivated by the idea that chapter four – Self-Consciousness – marks a new beginning or fundamental shift in topics. Most contemporary commentators have greatly criticised this position.

Beyond this context and acknowledging their intellectual differences, in this paper I argue that the analysis of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and Foucault's examination of subjectivity and truth, especially his distinction

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[12] Daniele Lorenzini, 'On Possibilising Genealogy', *Inquiry*, 9 January 2020, 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1712227.

[13] Pierre Macherey, 'Did Foucault Find a "Way Out" of Hegel?', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 1 June 2022, 10, https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764221084903.

[14] Macherey, 16.

[15] Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Princeton Monographs in Philosophy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 11.

[16] Pippin, 11.

between philosophy and spirituality, might serve very well as a complement for the study of subjectivity-constitution within the contemporary university considering the inseparability of epistemology and ethics (and ontology).[17] Overall, I argue that Foucault's ethical turn – or return to the subject – is an attempt to move away from Kant's epistemological analysis of the conditions of the possibility of knowledge which Foucault himself undertook in his early work – e.g., in *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. In that respect, Gros points out, referring to Foucault's turn,

> By situating his object of analysis at that level [the truth], Foucault escaped from the canons of both epistemology and the history of science: what was involved was no longer the question of the formal conditions of the possibility and progressive revelation of true discourses, but that of their historical-cultural conditions of existence. In 1984 [his last lecture], Foucault now constructs the distinction between an analysis of epistemological structures, on the one hand, and a study of "alethurgic" forms, on the other. The former addresses the question of what makes a true knowledge possible, the latter that of the ethical transformations of the subject, as it makes the subject's relation to self and others dependent on a particular kind of truth-telling.[18]

This movement from epistemology to ethics indicates a particular preoccupation: the historical-cultural conditions of existence. Or what Foucault also called the *modalities of experience*.[19] This is similar to Hegel's ontological logic, in which what is relevant is how the being comes into being under particular historical and social conditions. This system of thought attempts to escape from the structure and agency dichotomy – between discursive/epistemological structures and subjective experiences. This is what Rose, drawing on Hegel, called *speculative experience*:[20] an experience ontologically subjected to a *negative relation* between structures and experiences in which the self is always going-beyond-itself through, say, techniques of subjectivation or the path of despair. Or in other words, we can see a similar concern between Foucault and Hegel when it comes to analysing subjectivity: it is a battleground

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[17] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

[18] Frédéric Gros, 'Course Context', in *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984*, ed. François Ewald et al. (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 344.

[19] Michel Foucault, *Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-73900-4.

[20] Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London ; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Verso, 1995); Robert L. Scott, 'The Limits of Recognition', *Angelaki* 27, no. 6 (2 November 2022): 21–30, https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2022.2139007.

which inevitably becomes other than herself through historical and social determinations.

On the basis of this encounter, I present a theoretical perspective for the study of subjectivity based on the distinction – and inseparability – between *epistemology* and *ethics*,[21] that is, between practices devoted almost exclusively to the development of and for knowledge, on the one hand, and practices that modify the relationship that academics have with themselves, others and knowledge[22] in which conflictivity is essential, on the other. This analytical distinction, despite its inseparability, might be useful for understanding – in terms of the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production – how academics constitute themselves as ethical subjects within the broader context of the modern university.[23]

It is worth noting that in this paper I do not want to compare theorists from the perspective of what they attempted to do with their ideas – either a system of thought in the case of Hegel or fictional analyses in Foucault. What I want to do is to find intersections of how they approached and understood social life. In that respect, this paper seeks to contribute to new possibilities to explore the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge within the contemporary university. Or more specifically, it is an attempt to define the philosophical basis for studying the transformation of knowledge and the university. This has rarely been addressed by both higher education studies and social studies of science.[24]

Parallels and Bifurcations

Subjectivity and truth.

Despite Foucault's misleading reading of Hegel's phenomenology of spirit, what is relevant in this paper is the theoretical encounter that apparently marked Foucault's way of thinking about social life. What I want to suggest

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[21] Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France 1983–1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros et al. (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[22] Michel Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', in *Ethics. Essential Works 1954–84*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

[23] The contemporary academy is the embodiment of the Western model of university spread around the globe. Today this model is being confronted by multiple and disperse policies that make it difficult to classify in one category.

[24] Lisa Sigl, 'Subjectivity, Governance, and Changing Conditions of Knowledge Production in the Life Sciences', *Subjectivity* 12, no. 2 (June 2019): 117–36, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-019-00069-6.

is not that Foucault was influenced by this reading – which would lead to a different sort of analysis – but rather that this reading can be seen as the first – formal – encounter between them.

One particular point of departure of unexpected similarities and bifurcations between Foucault and Hegel is the relation between subjectivity and truth.[25] Foucault's 1980–81 lecture course *Subjectivity and Truth* and 1981–82 *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* developed an essential distinction between *philosophy* and *spirituality* that is illustrative of this encounter. In short, Foucault pointed out that Antiquity philosophy was not conceived merely as a body of knowledge (philosophy) but as a *mode of life*[26] (spirituality). Thus, spirituality was seen as a set of "researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, *not for knowledge but for the subject*"[27] [my emphasis].

However, at some point, which Foucault called *the Cartesian moment*, the link between philosophy and spirituality was broken. As a result, now the modern individual subject, in and of itself, is capable of having access to the truth. They only need a sort of "critical detachment" to know the truth.[28] Therefore, according to Foucault, "when the subject's being is not put in question by the necessity of having access to the truth […] we have entered a different age of the history of relations between subjectivity and truth."[29] Thus, Foucault asserted – following Descartes, Kant and others – the modern subject is by default capable of having access to the truth; that is, there is no requirement of the subject's being to be transformed for the truth, which means that

> evidence is substituted for ascesis at the point where the relationship to the self intersects the relationship to others and the world (…) After Descartes, we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge. This change makes possible the institutionalization of modern science.[30]

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[25] Ariën Voogt, 'Spirituality in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: An Analysis in the Wake of Foucault', *Metaphilosophy* 52, no. 5 (2021): 616–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12523.

[26] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, ed. Frédéric Gros, 1st ed, Lectures at the Collège de France (New York: Picador, 2006).

[27] Foucault, 15.

[28] Scott, 'The Limits of Recognition'.

[29] Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 18.

[30] Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', 279.

Modern scientific cognition would be a natural faculty of reason which only requires a sort of direct evidence to know the truth. According to Foucault then, although personal qualifications are needed, they are not concerned with the structure of spirituality.

Yet for Hegel it is not possible to separate philosophy and spirituality at any point. This relationship is an essential aspect of the path of self-consciousness towards absolute knowledge.[31] Or, in other words, judgment, or scientific cognition, does not just happen, it involves a struggle, conflict or practical achievement which entails the transformation of the subject – going-beyond-itself.[32] According to Voogt,

> (…) For Hegel, the two [philosophy and spirituality] are never separate. All strict conceptual reasoning is in fact always bound up with the conditions and exigencies of life and of life's concrete form in the historical period. And vice versa, transformations of consciousness, culture, and life are never disconnected from rational thought or the questioning of beliefs, values, and institutions that takes place within philosophy.[33]

Thus, in the Introduction of the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel criticises the attempts, from rationalism (Kant) to empiricism (Hume), of understanding knowledge as a tool through which we contemplate the truth; that is, as the *medium* that separates the subject and the object of knowledge. According to Hegel, this separation leads to the split between ways of knowing (epistemology) and existential experiences (ethics) within the subject of knowledge. As a result of this critique, Hegel suggests a form of knowing embedded in the *experience* of the natural consciousness (culture or common sense) in which epistemology and ethics are by necessity tied together. Thus,

> from this standpoint can instead be taken to be the path of natural consciousness pressing forward towards true knowing, or it can be taken to be the path of the soul wandering through the series of ways it takes shape, as if these were stations put forward in advance to it by its own nature, so that it purifies itself into spirit by arriving at a cognition of what it is in itself through the complete experience of its own self.[34]

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[31] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry P. Pinkard, The American Society of Missiology Series, No. 55 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[32] Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness.*

[33] Voogt, 'Spirituality in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', 11.

[34] Hegel, 52.

For Hegel the journey to true knowledge (epistemology: doubt) is an *existential experience* (ethics: despair); that is, it is immersed in a negative process in which the subject goes-beyond-itself through self-relation practices:

> This path can accordingly be regarded as the path of *doubt*, or, more properly, as the path of *despair* [my emphasis]; on this path, what happens is not what is customarily understood as doubt, a shaking of this or that supposed truth, followed by the disappearance again of the doubt, and then a return to the former truth so that in the end the thing at issue is taken as it was before. Rather, this path is the conscious insight into the untruth of knowing as it appears, a knowing for which that which is the most real is rather in truth only the unrealized concept.[35]

In that respect, Foucault focused on what he called *modalities of experience* to analyse the relationship between subjectivity and truth as "they are more *fragile* and unstable than codes and policies". What one could take from this idea is the fact that Foucault and Hegel have a similar understanding of what *experience* involves. What is at issue is not merely a "body of knowledge" but a "body of practices" that extends beyond standards, codes, laws, etc; that is, self-formation practices.

In that respect, Pippin offers a meaningful example to understand Hegel's position regarding the inseparability between epistemology and ethics:

> it seems very hard to understand why anyone would think that my awareness, say, not just of the contents of a lecture I am giving, but whatever kind of awareness I have of my being in the process of giving a lecture, of actually following appropriate lectures rules, should involve any such practical activity or achievement […] if some self-relation is a condition of intentional awareness, the conclusion that it is some sort of to-be-achieved follows for him straightforwardly.[36]

Reflecting on these considerations, Hegel and Foucault share the idea that the condition for having access to or knowing the truth depends on the transformation of the subject's being. For Foucault, however, there was a break (*Cartesian moment*) that changed the nature of that relationship. Despite this difference, one could argue that there is a fundamental similarity between Foucault's and Hegel's analysis of the relation between subjectivity and truth which might contribute to understanding how they intersect within the contemporary university when academics undertake investigation or produce knowledge.

The point is that the journey to truth requires the deployment of self-formation practices that extend beyond personal qualifications and include

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[35] Hegel, 52.
[36] Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 17.

the structure of the self. Indeed, some authors have used Foucault's ethi-
cal analysis to explore how modern scientific investigation involves practices
of the self that constantly rebuild the subject's being. For example, Daston
and Galison[37] have suggested that the development of personal qualifications
among scientists "have been seen in most accounts of modern science as mat-
ters of competence, not ethics."[38] Thus, rather than spiritual exercises, they
have referred to ethics in science as *scientific exercises*, that is, techniques of
subjectivation or techniques of the self on the self. For them, techniques of
scientific research – like scientific objectivity – are always techniques of the
self. For example, "the keeping of a lab notebook with real-time entries, the
discipline of grid-guided drawing (…) the training of voluntary attention,"[39]
which reflect the *will to willessness*[40] of modern scientists, can be seen as a set
of techniques of the self that transform the structure of spirituality.

Relation to oneself and others.

As I have said earlier, Foucault's ethical analysis focused on the free relation-
ship to oneself through self-formation practices. Yet he also emphasised a
relation to others within specific practices of the self – beyond controlling or
ruling others. For example, in an interview about the practice of silence as
a technique of the self, Foucault points out that "Young Romans or young
Greeks were taught to keep silent in very different ways according to the
people with whom they were interacting. Silence was then a specific form
of experiencing a relationship with others."[41] Similarly, writing as an ethical
practice can also be seen as a relation to oneself that depends on a relation
to others. That is to say, ethical work on the self includes a relation to others
inasmuch as they are always found in historical instances which determine the
continuities and discontinuities of these practices. In another interview, Fou-
cault adds, "What strikes me is that in Greek ethics people were concerned
with their moral conduct, their ethics, their relations to themselves and to
others much more than with religious problems."[42]

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[37] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone
Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2007).

[38] Daston and Galison, 39.

[39] Daston and Galison, 38.

[40] Daston and Galison, 38.

[41] Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984.
Vol. 1*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 122.

[42] Foucault, 255.

Thus, what is at issue in the ethical transformation of the subject is not merely a self-relation but a relation to others enmeshed in historical-cultural conditions of existence. In that respect, Foucault said in the *History of Sexuality*: "What I want to ask is: Are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other?"[43] Foucault's genealogies – of desire and critical attitude – were always thought of as part of a broader relationship beyond a relation to oneself. Or, one could say, Foucault regarded any relation to oneself as belonging to historical-cultural conditions. Thus, for example, the *mode of subjectivation*, which for Foucault is a mode of relating to contemporary reality, is a multidimensional relationship including oneself, others and objects. In sum, in Foucault's ethical analysis we find a relation to oneself which always refers to a relationship with others and truth. Or, more precisely, the other and the regime of truth to which it depends is a fundamental aspect of any relation to oneself.

In the Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel affirms that the basis of philosophical thought (or knowledge) is not the faculty of reason but the negative deployment of the self (ontological relation). Then, he refers to the self as a historical-social entity. That is to say, for Hegel, the foundation of knowledge lies in the process of a *culture coming into being*. Or, in other words, the self is already the end result of social and historical conditions. Thus, the natural consciousness includes the other in the form of objects or social relations. Hegel put it this way to refer to the relationship between the subject and knowledge,

> If we then investigate the truth of knowing, it seems that we are investigating what knowing is *in itself*. Yet in this investigation, knowing is *our* object. It is *for us*, and the *in-itself* of knowing, which would result from the investigation, would be instead its being *for us*. What we would assert to be its essence would instead not be its truth but rather only our knowing of it. The essence or the standard would lie within us (…)[44]

That is, nothing exists outside the experience of consciousness – neither the object of knowledge nor another subject of knowledge; that is,

> It turns out that behind the so-called curtain, which is supposed to hide what is inner, there is nothing to be seen if *we* ourselves do not go behind it, and one can see something behind the curtain only if there is something behind the curtain to be seen.[45]

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43 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 244.

44 Hegel, 55.

45 Hegel, 101.

For Hegel the path to self-consciousness implies a fundamental shift: from a subject/object relation to a subject/subject relation. In any relation to knowledge/truth what exists is no longer an object (a thing) but another subject – the latter is driven by freedom. This means that knowledge is not merely an intellectual and individual activity but it also includes a relation to others characterised by a struggle. Thus, for example,

> To be initiated into a linguistic community is to be initiated into all the pragmatic dimensions of appropriateness, authority, who gets to say what, when, and why. One is not a competent speaker as such until one has learned such matters of linguistic usage, and Hegel wants to treat such norms in terms of their historical conditions.[46]

To put it another way, rational thought not only requires a particular form of self-relation – practical achievement – but it also involves a relation to others. And "Hegel sees such an attempt and achievement as necessarily involving a relation to other people, as inherently social."[47] At this point, Hegel and Foucault seem to coincide in a fundamental aspect: a relation to oneself is embedded in historical and social transformations. However, Hegel considers the exercise of the self on the self as a social and historical practice that has effects on the totality (absolute knowledge), while Foucault understands the practices of the self on the self as a form of self-stylization. According to Voogt,

> In Foucault's understanding, it is primarily a transformation of the individual subject. But for Hegel this is definitely not the case. The formation of the individual consciousness can only happen by virtue of an already implicit transformation of the supra-individual Spirit itself (…) Hence, not only the individual subject needs to transform itself in order to enter the realm of absolute knowledge. The Spirit as such comes into being in the process of askēsis, of self-transformation on the path of despair and through the work of dialectics, at the end of which it finds itself at home again.[48]

In Hegel, a subject not only is an individual entity but also a collective one – in an ontological sense. The latter is the result of social and historical conditions in which the individual subject serves as its actualization. The individual subject is the expression of the collective one. Thus, having access to the truth, or producing knowledge, requires the transformation of the collective subject's being. For Foucault, the individual subject has priority over the collective one and the former seems to be organised around an aesthetic journey.

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46 Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, 18.
47 Pippin, 19.
48 Voogt, 'Spirituality in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit', 12.

Although there seems to be a crucial difference between Foucault and Hegel, some have argued that Foucault's genealogical analysis of ethical practices (e.g., fearless speech or *Parrhesia*) has a *possibilising* dimension.[49] According to Lorenzini, genealogical analysis of counter-conduct practices provides a normative framework that permits the creation of collective subjects. That is to say, counter-conduct practices entail the possibility of a political *we*. In that sense, it is possible to say that these collective subjects come into being in the process of self-formation practices, and concomitantly, the ethical transformation of the individual subject depends on changes in the collective subject. Here we find a correspondence on how Foucault and Hegel consider the relationship between subjectivity and totality (or regime of truth or episteme).

A non-transcendental subject.

Macherey[50] suggests that the notion of the *mode of subjectivation* developed by Foucault entails a non-transcendental subject – supposedly against Hegel's transcendental subject:

> The subject which constitutes himself through opposition has nothing to do with a transcendental subject: forever unfinished, on trial, tested, troubled, it is maintained under stress because of the uncertainty of its destiny; the process of its constitution is destined to never be achieved; it must be endlessly resumed, restarted, without the stages of its formation aligning along the trajectory of a path where they follow each other and accumulate in the form of a progression along a straight line.[51]

Although Macherey and Foucault attribute the existence of a transcendental subject – displaced but still transcendental – to Hegel, the idea of a subject constituted through opposition (or contradiction) resonates with Hegel's notion of negativity. The latter has nothing to do with a subject that needs to be completed or achieved as a subject. For Hegel, the subject, either individual or collective, is always coming into being – going-beyond-itself. That is, it is "forever unfinished" and needs to be permanently realised.

In both cases, the subject is not passive or receptive to power relations. Although constituted by a web of power/knowledge relations, the subject is active and productive by means of practices of the self on the self. Thus, for instance, the subject of parrhesia "is compelled to reinvent itself by drifting

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49 Lorenzini, 'On Possibilising Genealogy'.
50 Macherey, 'Did Foucault Find a "Way Out" of Hegel?'
51 Macherey, 13.

towards new versions of itself."[52] According to Foucault, the subject constitute itself through an array of processes of subjectivation in accordance with a given culture and time. Thus, "There are two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge."[53] The latter defines the ethical subject pointed out by Foucault which productively establishes the field of possibilities through self-formation practices within given power relations.

For Hegel, the subject is non-transcendental inasmuch as the self – individual or collective – is propelled by a negative force which makes it "forever unfinished." This negativity constitutes the collective subject – or intersubjectivity – through a sort of conflictivity.

I want to dive into this in more detail.

According to Hegel, "self-consciousness is *desire*."[54] This means that the subject – individual or collective – cannot escape from going-beyond-itself. For Hegel, the relationship between subjectivity and the object makes this negative force – or desire – always incomplete or needed to be permanently realised. That is, "Self-consciousness is thus unable through its negative relation to the object to sublate it, and for that reason it again, instead re-engenders the object as well as the desire."[55] In that respect, Hegel ontologised Kant's transcendental subject, providing an ontology in which the subject and the object are internally tied. While the Kantian transcendental subject defines the a priori rules that make knowledge possible, or provides the conditions of the possibility of knowledge and the categorical rules of judgement, the Hegelian subject is *ontologically* linked to the conditions that make any object or judging activity possible. For Hegel, these conditions or pure concepts of the understanding are not a priori rules defined by a subject, which for that reason become transcendental, but are differences inside the object. That is why Hegel has been referred to as part of *objective idealism*.

The way Hegel considers desire resonates with Foucault's concept of practices of the self or ethical work – e.g., practices of resistance. One could argue that the practices of the self are inevitable; that is, there is a fundamental tension driving self-formation practices which inexorably remake the subject. Or, for Foucault and Hegel the subject is non-transcendental since it cannot be completed or achieved. Simply put, it is a subjectivity: *the activity of being*

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[52] Macherey, 14.

[53] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1 July 1982): 781, https://doi.org/10.1086/448181.

[54] Hegel, 107.

[55] Hegel, 107.

a subject. For Foucault this activity is called *subjectivation* and for Hegel *game of forces*.

In addition, the place Foucault and Hegel gave to *freedom* when the subject is coming into being is crucial to understanding this non-transcendental subject. According to Foucault,

> When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men – in the broadest sense of the term – one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized.[56]

That is to say,

> (…) there is no face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom, which are mutually exclusive (freedom disappears everywhere power is exercised), but a much more complicated interplay. In this game freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power.[57]

Or, as Ball put it, individual subjects are always freer than they think.[58] That is to say, what is relevant for Foucault is not the abstract form of freedom but instead *practices of freedom*. In Foucault's words: "what is ethics, if not the practice of liberty, the considered practice of liberty (…) Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes". [59] This implies that freedom, as a practice, is inevitable. Yet it is not a condition of possibility like in Kant but something that is to be achieved. This can be framed under Foucault's famous quote about resistance – which is an expression of freedom: "Where there is power, there is resistance."[60]

For Hegel, desire is the evidence of freedom. His argument goes as follows: self-consciousness constitutes herself through a negative relation to another self-consciousness. This negativity is, as I highlighted earlier, desire.

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[56] Foucault, 'The Subject and Power', 790.

[57] Foucault, 790.

[58] Stephen J. Ball, *Foucault as Educator*, SpringerBriefs on Key Thinkers in Education (Springer International Publishing, 2017), //www.springer.com/la/book/9783319503004.

[59] Michel Foucault, 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom', in *Ethics. Essential Works 1954–84*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 281.

[60] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, 1st American ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

In Hegel's words: "*Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*"[61] These Self-consciousnesses relate to each other through desire (struggle) which is the expression of freedom. Thus, Hegel sees freedom as inevitable, an ontological condition of the self. As a result, Hegel, instead of focusing on human nature, considers freedom as the key element driving human history or social actions – in opposition to Hobbes and Locke. That is why later in the Phenomenology of Spirit, in the "Spirit" chapter, Hegel refers to the French Revolution as the expression of "Absolute freedom and Terror". According to Hegel, non-mediated freedom entails Terror. Or, for Hegel, the human history is the history of how humans deal with their freedom.

A theoretical encounter for the study of subjectivity-constitution in the academy.

Based on these considerations, what I would like to do now is to lay out an analytical framework for studying the intersection of subjectivity and knowledge in the contemporary university. The point of departure is that *all knowledge production practices have an ethical dimension.* Although knowledge production involves epistemological activities (judgement) such as reading, writing and analysing, I hold that all these practices can be thought of as ethics, or in Hegel's words, as an existential struggle or practical achievement. Ethical work – the transformation of the subject's being – is an essential part of researching and scientific investigation. However, the distinction between epistemology and ethics is needed to make this analytical framework possible. What I want to do next is to distinguish epistemology and ethics and then explain in what sense they are inevitably entangled in knowledge production practices. I will use concepts deployed in the previous sections.

Epistemological practices.

What makes knowledge possible? The production of knowledge within and beyond universities is driven – implicitly or explicitly – by this question. It is all about the limits of knowledge. Beyond the philosophical discussion about the implications of rationalism (dogmatism) and empiricism (scepticism), epistemological practices seek to make knowledge claims and their corrigibility

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61   Hegel, 107.

possible.[62] What is at stake here is the conditions of objective knowledge to be shared and disseminated widely (scientific consensus).

More precisely, knowledge production involves a *methodological* concern. If epistemology wants to make objective knowledge claims, what is essential is how the subject of knowledge enacts epistemology's conditions of possibility. These conditions, under the shade of the modern university, are defined by the methods or techniques of data collection and analysis. Thus, writing research questions, gathering evidence and analysing data are crucial epistemological practices aiming to make objective knowledge claims feasible. The point I am trying to make is the following: all epistemological practices are *for* knowledge. They have been designed to create and disseminate knowledge. The subject of knowledge adheres to it due to the need for reliability and replicability. Or in other words, the history of epistemological practices is the history of new conditions of possibility of objective knowledge.

In that respect, one could argue that epistemological practices seek the *unity* between the subject of knowledge and the object. Objective knowledge claims would be the end result of the intersection of a multiplicity inside the subject (ways of knowing) and the object (empirical variety). What knowledge claims entails is the unification of these multiplicities. There is a correspondence between the subject and the object through knowledge.

Ethical practices.

I have argued that epistemological practices have three features: 1) they are concerned with *methodology*; 2) they are created *for* knowledge; and 3) they seek *unity*. Unlike epistemology, ethical practices are defined by a relation to another *(collective) subject*, they are carried out to transform the *subject's being* and leads to *tragedy*. I will describe this in more detail.

First, knowledge (or judgement) does not just happen, it involves a struggle. This means that the question is not about what makes knowledge possible but what *form of life* emerges when knowledge is produced or how a given form of life shapes knowledge. Thereby, ethical practices are the relationship between the subject of knowledge and another subject. It is one self-consciousness dealing with another self-consciousness.

Second, ethical practices are *for the subject*. They are techniques of the self on the self. They transform the subject's being in a way that another self emerges. For instance, fieldwork – e.g., ethnography or observing time in a

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[62] Markus Gabriel, *The Limits of Epistemology*, trans. Alex Englander, English edition (Medford, MA: Polity, 2020).

telescope – involves specific research practices. These practices are not neutral since communities have defined how to undertake research in a certain way, providing guidelines and protocols. These often are entangled and multilayered processes, including people, objects and affects which change the researcher's self.[63] In each knowledge production process, the researcher is transformed into an other-of-itself. The dynamic and intensity of this change are what require more examination.

Third, ethical practices lead to *tragedy*. The tragedy can be seen through the creation and reconfiguration of multiple dualisms. Considering knowledge (in its diverse forms) as another subject, what prevails is a struggle between two free subjectivities, that is, between two activities of being a subject. This struggle of individual and collective subjectivities defines a form of knowledge that might well be contested. One example of this dualism is the post-truth phenomenon: the battle is not between the subject of knowledge and an objective claim but between two claims from two free subjects.[64]

Rejoining epistemology and ethics within the modern university.

I have distinguished epistemology and ethics to explore the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge within the contemporary university. Yet they – epistemology and ethics – are internally linked to each other. This entanglement can be seen as a *totality*, a space in which knowledge production practices are internally differentiated. Recognising the different angles whereby this entanglement can be examined, the essential aspect of this intersection is *how knowledge is constituted by ethical practices*. That is to say, how knowledge becomes an objective discourse and scientific outcome that depends on the ethical transformation of the *collective self*. That is what I want to highlight is this last section: the creation – or reestablishment – of a collective subject *for* knowledge.

Hegel, just right after stating that "*Self-consciousness attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness,*" points out that

> A *self-consciousness* is *for a self-consciousness*. Only thereby is there in fact self-consciousness, for it is only therein that the unity of itself in its otherness comes to

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[63] Donovan O. Schaefer, *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

[64] Sheila Jasanoff and Hilton R Simmet, 'No Funeral Bells: Public Reason in a "Post-Truth" Age', *Social Studies of Science* 47, no. 5 (October 2017): 751–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0306312717731936.

be for it. The I, which is the *object* of its concept, is in fact not an object. But the object of desire is only *self-sufficient*, for it is the universal, inerasable substance, the fluid self-equal essence (…)[65]

That is, the desire of a given self-consciousness is not only another self-consciousness but is to rebuild the *unity* of the self-consciousnesses – the universal or spirit. Or more precisely, "The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*."[66]

In a similar vein, Lorenzini upholds, drawing upon Foucault's genealogies of ethics, critical attitudes – and their examination – have a normative dimension.[67] That is to say, these attitudes and practices "create a concrete political framework for action (a political 'we') that commits us to resist the arbitrariness of the power/knowledge formations it reveals."[68] As of this assumption, I argue that ethical practices in general, either practices of accommodation or counter-conducts, always give rise to a *political we* or a collective subject. Thereby, the ethical transformation of the individual self is also the transformation of the collective one. And, the ethical transformation of the collective self is required for the transformation of the individual self.

We can see this mutual shaping when we examine cultural shifts within research communities. For example, moving from working in small groups using local equipment to working across global communities using large-scale and transnational research infrastructures requires the cultivation of a particular self. In that context, we should ask: *what has to be true about the collective self in order for this individual self to exist?* The need to work across global networks has emerged from a historical process and a specific form of academic life. Configuring a particular discourse and practice around global collaboration has led to demands for a new academic self. This mutual shaping is essential since, as I argued earlier, freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. What drives these transformations is a desire (freedom) deployed through practices of the self on the self.

The ethical transformation of the subject – both individual and collective – leads to a fundamental *reconfiguration of the limits and dynamics of knowledge*. Or, the ways knowledge emerges involve a form of life beyond disciplinary boundaries. And this is when epistemology and ethics are rejoined again. Knowledge results from the intersection of the individual and collective self and how this relationship is *momentarily* solved within a community at a given time and culture. If we accept that this interaction is mediated

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[65] Hegel, 109.
[66] Hegel, 109.
[67] Lorenzini, 'On Possibilising Genealogy'.
[68] Lorenzini, 7.

by conflictivity (desire in the form of freedom), in that case, it implies that knowledge is embedded in a permanent negotiation/struggle between subjectivities – i.e., a form of life, rather than scientific consensus, drives knowledge production. What is fundamental to address is the ethical dimension of the academic subjectivity for knowledge to be produced – this approach positions human entities over non-human ones, or more precisely, non-human agency ultimately depends on the constitution of a form of life (or a historical self a priori). These forms of life vary according to the community, discipline, institution and geographical location, but recognising their existence seems to be a fundamental step forward in analysing academic subjectivities and the conditions of the contemporary university. Although it is widely accepted that knowledge is co-constituted by the conditions of its making, I argue that focusing on the form of life provides an insightful perspective to discuss the *possibilising* dimension of everyday practices.

Concluding Remarks

I want to conclude by highlighting the logic behind this theoretical proposal: we need an approach to explore *the experience of the self* within the contemporary university. We do not need an approach to define the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, or how we can organise discursive practices. We need to understand how the self, which permanently becomes other-than-themselves, deploys itself through techniques of the self or the path of despair; that is, how the self in itself produces distinctive *modes of coming into being*.

Despite the differences between Foucault's and Hegel's intellectual projects, there are significant intersections in terms of their concern with subjectivity and its historical-cultural conditions of existence. Both philosophers address the transformative nature of subjectivity, shaped by historical and social determinations. Foucault's ethical turn represents a shift from Kant's epistemological analysis of knowledge towards an exploration of the ethical transformations of the subject. Similarly, Hegel's ontological logic emphasises how being emerges within specific historical and social contexts.

In conclusion, while Foucault and Hegel have distinct intellectual projects, their examination of subjectivity provides valuable insights when studied in tandem. Their focus on the historical-cultural conditions of existence and the transformative nature of subjectivity offers a rich framework for understanding the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge within contemporary academic contexts.

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