

From Deconstruction to Observation: On the Fundamental Structure and Dialectical Development of Foucault's Genealogical Method

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Abstract

Foucault's genealogical method developed into a coherent framework that reflects a dialectical progression. Rather than merely adopting Nietzsche's morally critical genealogy aimed at value critique, Foucault transformed it into a "cartographic" approach for analyzing power structures. In his early seminal work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault employed genealogy to reveal the core configuration of modernity-"power-knowledge-subject"-demonstrating the method's potent deconstructive force as a tool for power analysis. Yet the success of this deconstruction also placed Foucault in a theoretical predicament: if the subject is entirely constituted by power-knowledge, where does its capacity for self-constitution lie? Consequently, Foucault's later genealogical practice took a significant turn, especially in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality*. Here, his approach shifted from a "critical" genealogy aimed at exposing mechanisms of power to a constructive genealogy that adopts a stance of "detached observation" in presenting the history of self-techniques. This evolution marks the transformation of Foucault's genealogy from a static methodology into a dialectical process that integrates "deconstruction" and "detached observation," moving from "power analysis" toward "subject interpretation." It not only enriches the substance of genealogy but also opens up new perspectives for understanding the formation of the modern subject and its ethical possibilities.

Keywords

Foucault; Genealogical Method; Dialectical Development; Subject Genealogy.

1. Introduction

Michel Foucault's adoption and transformation of the genealogical method constitutes the methodological thread of his philosophical project. Although Foucault explicitly inherited Nietzsche's mantle in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," his genealogical practice was not a simple application of the Nietzschean paradigm. Instead, it underwent a profound evolution within his own intellectual trajectory, signifying a theoretical turn. This paper aims to systematically trace this dynamic development of Foucauldian genealogy and reveal its internal theoretical logic and innovations.

In Foucault's early genealogical practice, the difference between his philosophical method and Nietzsche's use of genealogy was already apparent: the latter aimed at a critique of values, while the former focused on the analysis of power structures. In works such as *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault demonstrated a mature genealogical model-namely, a deconstructive analysis of the core modern configuration of "power-knowledge-subject"-showcasing genealogy's potency as a tool for power analysis. However, the very success of this deconstructive work placed Foucault in a theoretical dilemma: if the subject is entirely constituted by power-knowledge, then where does the dimension of the subject's self-constitution lie?

Consequently, a significant shift occurred in genealogical practice. This shift primarily took place in Foucault's later works, especially volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality*: from a "critical" genealogy aimed at exposing power mechanisms to a "constructive" genealogy that presents the history of technologies of the self with an attitude of "bystanding". In this new mode, genealogy no longer rushes to reduce historical phenomena to power relations. Instead, it suspends its deconstructive impulse, allowing the practical logic of self-formation in the ancient world to present itself autonomously. Therefore, Foucault's genealogy is by no means a singular, static methodology. Rather, it is a dialectical developmental process moving from "power analysis" to "subject interpretation," and integrating "deconstruction" with "bystanding". This evolution not only enriches the substance of genealogy but also opens up new perspectives for understanding the formation of the modern subject and its ethical possibilities.

2. Hammer and Cartography: A Genealogical Comparison of Nietzsche and Foucault

In his 1971 essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Michel Foucault distilled and summarised a research methodology fundamentally opposed to traditional historiography: genealogy. Genealogy rejects origins, denies linear development and totalising history, demanding a return to historical detail to construct genealogies. In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche employed genealogy to dissect the origins of moral values, exposing their humble beginnings; Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, used genealogy to uncover the hidden power structures within brutal penal systems and modern prisons and disciplinary institutions. Yet, their specific applications of genealogy diverged. In the chapter "The Concept of Genealogy" of *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze likens Nietzsche's genealogy to a "hammer," asserting that genealogy is "the only way to philosophise with a hammer"[1]; whereas in *Foucault*, Deleuze likens Foucault's genealogy to a "cartograph"[2]. I contend that these metaphors of "hammer" and "mapping" vividly reveal the core distinction between Nietzsche's genealogy as a mission of value critique and Foucault's as a task of power analysis. [2] The following sections will examine their respective genealogical practices before attempting a comparative analysis.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* stands as one of his seminal works employing genealogy. In its preface, Nietzsche explicitly articulates his motivations and methodology for genealogical inquiry. He criticises past moral philosophers for merely philosophising about pre-existing moral concepts without investigating their origins and histories. Unlike other moral philosophers seeking origins, Nietzsche "no longer searches for the origin of evil beyond the world,"[3] but instead inquires "under what conditions did man invent the value judgements good and evil"[3]. This reveals that genealogy concerns not specific ethical concepts, but the value of moral values themselves. Adhering to this fundamental stance, Nietzsche addressed in three essays the origins of value concepts like good and evil, the emergence of the "guilt-consciousness" tormenting modern humanity, and the formidable power of "ascetic idealism." He progressively revealed the master-slave dialectic oscillating between "good" and "evil," the "cruel internalisation" of humanity's bloody and sinful animal instincts, and the compromising nature of ascetic idealism. Examining the specific content of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche's genealogy opposes the sacred essence of origins, exposing the base, vulgar, and bloody origins of morality. It strives to demonstrate the fluidity, discontinuity, and transformation of moral concepts throughout history, ultimately achieving a moral self-overcoming within this process. As Deleuze observes in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Nietzsche's genealogy constitutes "the true realisation of critique", functioning like a hammer that shatters all established values. Through therapeutic hammering, Nietzsche intended to chip away the sacred gilding from the surface of moral values, exposing their pathological roots to achieve the

spirit's self-overcoming. It returns all things and origins to value, allowing specific historical entities to be reborn within these values.

In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Foucault adopted Nietzsche's genealogical method, subsequently developing his own Foucauldian genealogy in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault applied genealogy to the study of psychiatry, clinical medicine, and the history of sexual experience, thereby exploring its application to questions of discourses of power and subject formation in modern society. Broadly speaking, Foucault's reception of Nietzschean genealogy unfolded in two distinct phases. In *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, he conceived genealogy as a questioning of identity, noting that "what is discovered at the historical beginning of a thing is not the identity left by its unshakeable origin, but rather the inconsistency of various other things, a disparity". At this juncture, Foucault's understanding of genealogy remained constrained within Nietzsche's philosophical discourse, viewing it as a "hammer" for "digging at the foundations" and dispelling the illusion of origin. In *Discipline and Punish*, however, Foucault explicitly applied genealogy to the analysis of cruel penal practices and the prison system, demonstrating the entire process by which punitive power transformed from direct physical torment to the discipline of the soul and behaviour. During this period, I think, Foucault's "cartographic" genealogy achieved mature application.

It is precisely in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault's genealogy reveals a distinct focus from Nietzsche's. Whereas Nietzsche prioritised moral values as the primary subject of genealogical inquiry, Foucault at this juncture directed his genealogical investigation towards "rebel knowledge," vigorously excavating historical events that had yet to enter the mainstream rationalist gaze. If Nietzsche's genealogy concerned the "excavation of the subaltern"[3], Foucault's genealogy sought the "discovery of the margins": he employed genealogy to bring the incarceration and prison carts situated at the margins of reason into the philosophical field of vision, thereby directing attention towards the boundaries where reason fractures. Here, Foucault astonishingly discovered that the structure of "power-knowledge-subject" permeates the confrontation between the prison and its guards, symbols of reason, and the prisoners, symbols of irrationality. Subsequent research extended this structure to every corner of the map of modern life. As Deleuze describes Foucault's genealogy in his book *Foucault*: "these illustrations are coloured in a minutely drawn map".[2]

From my point of view, it is noteworthy that Foucault's genealogy constitutes "mapping" rather than the map itself. This crucial distinction stems from Foucault's fusion of archaeology and genealogy. Foucault completed *The Archaeology of Knowledge* prior to writing *Discipline and Punish*. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he elaborates upon and reflects deeply on his archaeological methodology. Deleuze keenly discerned the pivotal role of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* within Foucault's intellectual trajectory: "this archaeology was not merely a book of reflections or a general method, but a new orientation, like a new folding acting upon the earlier books." [2] Archaeology and genealogy intertwine yet maintain distinct emphases: if genealogy concerns "why knowledge has become what it is," archaeology focuses on examining "what knowledge is." In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's renewed interrogation of "what knowledge is" implies his rejection of the conventional understanding of knowledge under rationalism, instead attempting to return to the original excavation of knowledge's origins to uncover knowledge excluded by reason. Specifically, archaeology investigates "statements," "will not concern itself with what previous archivists have treated in a thousand different ways: propositions and phrases." [2] In other words, Foucault's archaeology rejects linguistic structures built upon propositions and phrases, instead focusing on statements not yet fixed as propositions or sentences. Foucault contends that genuine knowledge resides within these "statements" before they solidify into propositions and sentences. Once statements become rigidified by normativity, losing their dynamism and diversity, they degenerate into propositions. Archaeology's task lies in dismantling the edifice of knowledge

underpinned by propositions and phrases, excavating statements buried beneath rational order, and placing all knowledge on a single plane for scrutiny. This signifies that archaeology's work is to create maps, enabling Foucault's gaze to reach the very edges of the map inscribed with reason and knowledge, seeking the most primordial forms of the opposition between the rational and the irrational. It is thus that Foucault discovered leprosy and the ship of fools, subsequently entering the struggle between the prison and the prisoner. In essence, if archaeology lays the foundations and levels the ground, excavating and laying bare deeply buried statements, then genealogy draws upon this groundwork to map the structural blueprints and pipework of the edifice, revealing how power circulates among these statements to form the solid structure of the "power-knowledge-subject" complex.

Having established the "cartographic" nature of Foucault's genealogy distinct from Nietzsche's "hammer", it is crucial to delve into the fundamental structure that this mapping endeavor reveals: the intricate nexus of power, knowledge, and the subject. This nexus, however, while powerfully explanatory, would itself become the source of a theoretical impasse that necessitated genealogy's further transformation.

3. Power, Knowledge and Subject: Philosophical Discoveries under Genealogy

For Foucault, genealogy serves as a key methodological tool for analyzing the concrete operations of power. Unlike traditional historiography that seeks origins, genealogy traces the "lowly beginnings" [1] of objects, revealing their complex emergence from chance, struggle, and relations of force. In Foucault's framework, genealogy rejects the conception of power as a macro-entity that can be possessed or transferred. Instead, it treats power as a fluid, subjectless "micro-power" permeating the finest pores of the social body. Through genealogical analysis, Foucault meticulously examines the techniques of power developed in marginal institutions such as prisons, hospitals, schools, and barracks, revealing how "disciplinary power" operates in a continuous, hidden manner upon the human body, molding it into a "docile and useful" disciplined individual. In this writing piece, I will attempt to elucidate the nature and structure of power as revealed through Foucault's genealogical investigations.

In fact, Foucault does not provide a definitive definition of power but instead integrates its analysis into genealogical inquiry. Since genealogy concerns the "descent" of things, unraveling the true nature of power requires studying its origins-addressing fundamental questions such as what power refers to, where it comes from, and where it resides. Foucault argues that power is "a multiplicity of force relations." These relations "support one another, form chains or systems, or, on the contrary, become disjunctives and contradict one another". [2] Here, Foucault outlines the fundamental characteristics of power. Traditional views often equate power with political power, further regarding it as a symbol of the state and ruling class, to which non-ruling-class individuals can only submit without themselves wielding power. Genealogy challenges this view. From a genealogical perspective, power is a relation of forces—a complex network formed by the interplay of forces. As Foucault states, "Power functions in the form of a chain... individuals are both its vehicles and its agents". [3] Notably, Foucault here reveals the true mechanism of power's operation: the "network." This network not only constitutes the arena of power's functioning but also represents the social mechanism in Foucault's philosophy.

Foucault further subjects this "network" to genealogical analysis. He argues that "power-knowledge-subject" constitutes the core operational mechanism and relational structure of modernity. Power, knowledge, and the subject possess no a priori attributes but are constructed outcomes operating through specific historical relational networks. Through genealogy, Foucault deconstructs modernity's relational network, delineating the generative

relationships among the three: power produces specific forms of knowledge, knowledge shapes and legitimizes power's operations, and, in this process, specific modern forms of subjectivity are constructed by the socio-system of power-knowledge. Thus, the modern category of the subject is essentially a power-constructed concept.

Foucault first critiques and rethinks modern power, the most crucial element of this structure. In his view, power is not, as Adorno and Horkheimer asserted, a dominating force originating from the age of myths, nor does it simply become a new instrument of domination in modern society[4,5]. Instead, modern power-particularly disciplinary power-is primarily a productive force. Its operation is not merely repressive or dominating but actively participates in constructing various social elements. Simultaneously, knowledge is continuously generated within the operation of power, becoming knowledge imbued with specific relational attributes. Hence, the "power-knowledge" relation expresses itself as a symbiotic apparatus. For example, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault analyzes the structure of controlling discourse, arguing that clinical medical knowledge is not a passive discovery of the "truth" of illness but a product intricately intertwined and co-constructed with power practices such as hospital spatial organization, diagnostic techniques, and medical record-keeping systems.

Building on this, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault uses genealogy to further deconstruct the "power-knowledge" relationship, revealing its collusive structure. Genealogy introduces the dimension of power and struggle, dynamically analyzing the formation of knowledge-power complexes. On one hand, through archaeological methods, Foucault reveals how discourses-statement practices governed by specific rules-constitute the conditions of possibility for knowledge in particular historical periods. These discourses do not merely describe the world; instead, they actively participate in constructing objects of knowledge and, in turn, contribute to constituting the subject. Modern knowledge systems no longer treat the human being as a unified, rational subject but decompose human subjectivity into categories and concepts. Individuals are compelled and trained to understand themselves through these knowledge categories-to interpret their behaviors, desires, and even their nature. Thus, knowledge ceases to be a tool possessed and utilized by the subject and instead becomes a force that constructs subjectivity.

Beginning with *The Discourse on Language*, power is placed at the center of the examination of individual life. The complex relationship between body and power is fully articulated in *Discipline and Punish*. In this work, the metaphysical knowing subject is dismantled and replaced by the body and power. The body becomes the site of inscription, where all power struggles are visibly written.[6] Foucault argues that the body's plasticity derives from external sources-a series of meticulous mechanisms that continuously train, correct, and normalize the body and its actions. These mechanisms, in turn, rely heavily on knowledge-provided classification standards, evaluative norms, and behavioral models. Thus, power and knowledge are bound together, jointly forming the field within which the subject is shaped. Schools, factories, hospitals, prisons, and even families become sites for exercising this "normalizing power." Within these institutions, individuals are perpetually observed, assessed, compared, and classified. They are compelled to measure, adjust, and transform themselves according to knowledge-derived "norms." It is through this mechanism of internalizing external power demands via knowledge that the modern individual is constructed as a subject. Therefore, the formation of subjectivity is essentially a process of subjectification wherein individuals actively apply power relations to themselves.

The deconstructive power of the "power-knowledge-subject" framework, as exemplified in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, is undeniable. Yet, its very success traps the subject in a deterministic cage, leaving no room for self-constitution or agency. This is the precise theoretical dilemma that propelled Foucault's genealogical practice into its final, and most significant, phase-a shift from critique to "bystanding".

4. The Genealogy of the Subject as "Bystanding": On Foucault's Use of Genealogy in *The History of Sexuality*

In works such as *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault demonstrates a mature genealogical method. Foucault's genealogy refuses to seek the sublime truth of origins, instead focusing on moments of "emergence" – those instances where forces collide, contingency erupts, and which ultimately manifest in the historical process as the panoptic architecture of the prison and the clinical gaze of medicine. Through genealogical analysis of these historical events, Foucault uncovers the micro-powers lurking within them and proposes the theoretical framework of "power-knowledge-subject" to deconstruct the modern subject. However, it is precisely this successful deconstructive project that leads Foucault into a profound intellectual dilemma and prompts a turning point in genealogy itself as Foucault's fundamental philosophical methodology. In Foucault's later works, especially in Volume Two, *The Use of Pleasure*, and Volume Three, *The Care of the Self*, of *The History of Sexuality*, we can observe a genealogy entirely heterogeneous to that of the period of power critique. This heterogeneity is manifested not only in genealogy's analysis of modes of subjectivation in ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and early Christianity but, more importantly, in how Foucault suspends the analysis and deconstruction of power structures within historical events. Genealogy seems to sheath its critical edge, turning instead to "bystanding" the practical processes of technologies of the self. In this article, I will focus on Foucault's analysis of his theoretical tasks in this period in the Introduction to Volume Two of *The History of Sexuality*, and on his genealogical analysis of the core concept of "*technologies of the self*" in Chapter Two, "The Cultivation of the Self," of Volume Three, to specifically discuss the shift in Foucault's application of genealogy during this period. In 1976, Michel Foucault published Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Will to Knowledge*. In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault largely continues the research methods and theoretical orientation of *Discipline and Punish*, taking power relations and their modes of operation as his primary object of study. In his genealogical analysis of "sexuality," Foucault traces its trajectory from 17th-century Christian confessional practices to various fields of knowledge in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy, and demography, meticulously depicting how "sex" gradually transforms from an issue belonging primarily to the realms of morality and theology into an object meticulously analyzed, classified, managed, and controlled by multiple discourses. [7,8]The core discovery of this genealogical investigation is that power does not merely play a repressive, prohibitive role, saying "no," as commonly imagined; on the contrary, a productive, positive power operates by encouraging, inciting, and proliferating discourses about sex. Specifically, Foucault uses "sexuality" as the operational pivot of power relations, building a bridge between sex and power. Foucault finds that starting from the end of the 16th century, "we supported a Victorian regime, and we continue to be dominated by it even today." [1]. This Victorian norm of life was particularly evident in the constraints imposed on sexual experience and conduct. But at the same time, the discourse on sex, after undergoing "sexual permeation" and "perversion," was constantly activated, produced, and reproduced. Here, Foucault uses genealogy to analyze in detail the evolution of confessional practices. In the Christian tradition, believers were required to confess all desires and actions related to the flesh to a priest, not only actions but also delving into every ripple of thought. This "obligation to confess" was intensified during the Counter-Reformation and gradually secularized, permeating the social fabric. By the 19th century, the form of confession had shifted: in the doctor's consulting room, patients were required to narrate their sexual history and preferences in detail; on the psychiatric couch, sexual perverts became cases to be analyzed and classified; in the pedagogical classroom, childhood "masturbation" became a focus requiring supervision and correction; even within the private space of the family, parents began anxiously observing and guiding their children's sexual

development. This series of practices constituted a dense network for the production of "sexual discourse." Consequently, Foucault further analyzes and points out: "people will accept my saying that, for two centuries now, the discourse on sex has been multiplied rather than rarefied"[1]. The seemingly contradictory repression of sexual experience and the liberation of sexual discourse are, in fact, not contradictory; they are essentially two interrelated and mutually constraining poles in the movement of the power mechanism, the result of the interaction of various power relations within the apparatus of sexuality. In social reality, these power relations revolving around sex manifest concretely as the disciplinary power over bodies and the regulatory power of the government over populations. Through his analysis of the power to execute and the death penalty, Foucault points out: "It was at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life. On the one hand it was tied to the disciplines of the body. On the other hand, it was applied to the regulation of populations, through all the far-reaching effects of its activity." [1] There is no doubt that in his analysis of concepts such as "sexual discourse" and "biopower," Foucault maturely employs the genealogical method of "power analysis": on the one hand, Foucault interprets sex within the context of power relations. Using genealogy, Foucault reveals that power does not simply prohibit or erase sex, but through meticulous guidance, incitement, and classification, makes it a central domain that must be constantly spoken about, examined, analyzed, and managed. For example, the anxiety surrounding childhood "masturbation" did not lead to silence about children's sexuality; instead, it gave rise to a series of discursive practices such as pediatric medicine, family pedagogy, and adolescent psychology, aimed at supervising, correcting, and normalizing children's bodies and desires. On the other hand, the "power-knowledge" framework presented in *Discipline and Punish* is also retained: the exercise of power constantly creates and incites objects and domains of knowledge, such as the management of sexual perversities giving rise to sexual pathology. Conversely, the formation and accumulation of knowledge inevitably produce power effects, such as sexological knowledge providing a "scientific" basis for societal normalizing interventions. In the domain of sexuality, confessional techniques and psychological knowledge, demographics and eugenic knowledge, all perfectly exemplify this "power-knowledge" symbiosis.

It is worth noting that Foucault had initially conceived a six-volume plan for *The History of Sexuality*. However, after the publication of the first volume, Foucault did not proceed according to the original plan to prepare and publish the subsequent volumes. The long intellectual hiatus seemed to foreshadow a significant theoretical shift during this period. Foucault himself acknowledges this potential shift and the fundamental difference between Volume Two and Volume One in the *Introduction* to Volume Two, *The Use of Pleasure*: "this series of studies is being published later than I had anticipated, and in a form that is altogether different"[6]. Foucault states, "To speak of sexuality as a historically singular experience also presupposed the availability of tools capable of analyzing the peculiar characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that constitute it: (1) the formation of sciences that refer to it, (2) the systems of power that regulate its practice, (3) the forms within which individuals are able, are obliged, to recognize themselves as subjects of this sexuality." [6] Foucault considers that his previous research on medicine and psychiatry, power and punishment, addressed the first two points. Regarding the third point, however, Foucault acknowledges the difficulty: "But when I came to study the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects, the problems were much greater." [6] Specifically, this difficulty lies primarily in the particularity of the research topic, "sexuality," itself: this theme exists not only in certain variable forms in the theories of classical *scientia sexualis* but also in concepts seeking to escape, suppress, or circumvent it. This thematic particularity prompted a methodological shift for Foucault—not a shift from the genealogy of power analysis to a completely different method, but a shift towards a different mode of employing genealogy: "In short, with this genealogy the idea

was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behavior was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain." [6]

The shift in the mode of employing the genealogical method is first a shift in research focus and theme. Foucault notes, "After first studying the games of truth in their interplay with one another, as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then studying their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices-I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called the history of desiring man." [6] Considering the specific theoretical development in Volumes Two and Three of *The History of Sexuality*, this shift means that the theme of Foucault's genealogical inquiry undergoes a clear evolution: initially exploring the interplay of truth games and power relations, it turns in Volumes Two and Three to studying the truth games in the relationship of self with self and the process of subject formation. In Volumes Two and Three, the power-analytical dimension of genealogy is suspended, shifting instead to analyzing the formation and shaping of the modern subject. This fundamental change in research theme stems from the profound theoretical and methodological reflections Foucault encountered during his work on Volume One of *The History of Sexuality*. JAMES D. FAUBION keenly observed this. She noted: "It proved, however, too narrow to allow him adequately to address 'the modes in which individuals are brought to recognize themselves as sexual subjects'." [9] This means that Foucault recognized that if the mechanism of "sexual experience" were interpreted solely as a product of the power-knowledge collusion, it might fall into another "narrow" trap: it would seem that the individual is entirely a passive product constructed by power mechanisms. Such an understanding cannot adequately explain a key question: why do individuals participate so deeply in the examination, confession, and interpretation of their own desires, internalizing these norms, thereby constructing themselves as sexual subjects possessing a certain authenticity? [10]

Precisely for this reason, Foucault initiates a shift in the theme of genealogical research in Volume Two, *The Use of Pleasure*. Foucault turns his gaze to ancient Greece prior to the Christian era. This return to ancient Greece exemplifies Foucault's typical genealogical strategy: by returning to an era considered the "origin" of Western sexuality, he reveals its fundamental rupture with modern models, thereby dismantling the linear historical view that posits "sex" as having an eternal truth. In ancient Greece, Foucault's analytical focus is not "sexual acts" themselves, but a broader concept, aphrodisia (pleasure). The ancient Greeks' concern with pleasure centered on a core issue: how does an individual, as a free subject, "use" bodily pleasures in a moderate, appropriate manner, to shape a beautiful, noble, and praiseworthy style of life? Through analyzing three main relationships of the male citizen-relationships with his own body, with his wife, and with boys-Foucault unfolds a genealogical analysis of practices of the self, elaborating in detail this culture of the self. For example, in the relationship with boys, the core issue is not identity based on sexual orientation (the category "homosexuality" did not exist then), but the complex socio-ethical relationship between the adult lover and the beloved youth. [6] A free adult male must demonstrate restraint, respect, and assume the responsibility of an educator; his conduct is subject to an ethical requirement of "moderation," aimed at shaping the youth's freedom and virtue, not merely satisfying his own desires. Power relations, such as age and social status, and truth games, concerning how to love correctly and be loved correctly, are intertwined here, but their aim points towards the subject's self-stylization and self-mastery. [6] Therefore, the shift in genealogical theme signifies that Foucault no longer merely views the subject as an outcome of power relations, but reveals the duality of the process of subjectivation: on the one hand, the subject is indeed constituted within specific historical, cultural, and "power-knowledge" configurations. But on the other

hand, subjectivation also always entails a practice of self-formation, an active, albeit historically conditioned, construction of a "relation to oneself." As Martin Saar points out: "Genealogy in an interesting and constitutive way always does concern subjects or selves, i.e. something that is concerned about itself in its very being." [10]

Simultaneously, I personally believe that the shift in Foucault's genealogy during this period is manifested not only in the change of research theme but also, more significantly, in his specific genealogical analysis of historical events. Here, Foucault no longer wields genealogy as a sharp tool to deconstruct historical phenomena, reducing them to "power-knowledge" structures; instead, he adopts an attitude of "bystanding": when Foucault uses genealogy to uncover the practices of technologies of the self in ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, and early Christianity, the critical and deconstructive edge of genealogy is suspended. It no longer participates in the analysis of historical events as a weapon of deconstruction but stands by, observing the processes of the subject's self-formation and self-constitution.

Before proceeding with the specific analysis, I wish to clarify the philosophical implication of the term "bystanding" here. The genealogy of "bystanding" does not signify a value-neutral indifference or a passive abandonment of critical thought. On the contrary, it represents a strategic retreat and a methodological tendency towards self-restraint after genealogy reaches a certain critical point. Its core lies in this: after successfully revealing that a set of practices or discourses has a historical, contingent "descent," genealogy does not rush to attribute it simply to another grand, deterministic force structure, such as the "power-knowledge" structure prominent in Foucault's earlier research. Instead, it suspends its own deconstructive impulse, allowing the specific practical logic and modes of self-relation within history to manifest and speak for themselves. Further, this is a methodological application leaning towards the phenomenological "return to the things themselves," allowing the inherent structure, internal tensions, and aesthetics of existence of the historical material to present themselves in their original complexity. The task of genealogy at this point is to provide a stage for these vanished technologies of the self to display themselves, to let their internal forms and developments appear, rather than hastily "digesting" or "incorporating" them using a theoretical framework external to these practices.

Chapter Two, "The Cultivation of the Self," in Volume Three of *The History of Sexuality, The Care of the Self*, is precisely the concrete site for practicing this "bystanding" genealogy. In this chapter, Foucault meticulously examines texts concerning practices of the self in Greco-Roman philosophy during the first two centuries AD. Here, Foucault's research aim is not to prove that these technologies of the self are products of some hidden power mechanism, but to adopt a "bystanding" stance, allowing the internal logic and purpose of these practices to clearly emerge. For instance, analyzing epistolary practices, Foucault points out that in the tradition of Seneca and others, letter writing was a crucial "spiritual exercise." [7] By writing to friends, such as Seneca to Lucilius, the individual is effectively engaged in continuous self-examination and philosophical training. What Foucault "observes" here is a practical logic of acting upon the self through discursive exchange with others, aimed at mutual ethical perfection. The subtlety of the "bystanding" genealogy Foucault employs here lies further in his thorough suspension of two common analytical tendencies. [11] First, he avoids a teleological interpretation of this epistolary practice as a crude "precursor" or preparatory stage for the Christian confessional institution. That is, Foucault does not attempt to read the seeds of later confessional techniques in these letters, but treats them as an independent, self-sufficient ethical system with its own internal logic and value. Simultaneously, Foucault restrains the impulse to attribute it directly to some external power structure. Instead, he allows the logic of the texts themselves to fully unfold, focusing on revealing what this practice meant for the practitioners themselves.

Through this "bystanding" analysis of subjectivation practices, Foucault discovers that prior to the emergence of Christian confessional techniques and modern psychological self-

examination, there existed in Western history a distinctly different mode of subjectivation. This mode was not a passive construction but an active self-formation. Its driving force did not stem from submission to a normalizing power but from an active pursuit of an "aesthetics of existence," a desire for a beautiful, noble, and autonomous style of life. The "bystanding" genealogy of the subject does not forcibly subsume this set of practices into the "power-knowledge" analytical framework; instead, it allows the ethical intensity and internal logic of these practices themselves to become manifest.

5. Conclusion

Foucault's genealogical method constitutes a coherent yet dynamically evolving framework, marked by a decisive dialectical shift in its application and theoretical aims. Its core innovation lies not in a singular methodological formula, but in this transformative progression driven by the method's own internal logic. Initially developed as a "cartographic" tool for power analysis, genealogy brilliantly deconstructed the modern "power-knowledge-subject" nexus, revealing the subject as a product of specific historical configurations of discipline and discourse. This very success, however, engendered a theoretical impasse concerning the possibility of agency and self-formation.

The pivotal innovation emerged as genealogy strategically evolved to address this dilemma. In its later phase, exemplified in the studies of antiquity, the method consciously suspended its deconstructive impulse. Shifting from a critical genealogy focused on exposing power mechanisms, it adopted a stance of "detached observation." This allowed the historical practices of self-cultivation-the *techniques de soi*-to present their own internal logic and purposes, without being hastily reduced to another determinant structure like power-knowledge. This "bystanding" posture enabled genealogy to illuminate the processes of *subjectivation*: the ways individuals actively work on themselves to constitute their own subjectivity within given historical conditions.

Thus, the fundamental advancement of Foucault's genealogy is this dialectical integration. It moves from analyzing how subjects are constituted by external apparatuses to observing how they constitute themselves through ethical practices. This journey from "power analysis" to "subject interpretation" transcends a static methodological definition, revealing genealogy as a self-correcting, dialectical process. It enriches the method by allowing it to account for both the constraints of power and the possibilities for ethical self-creation, thereby offering a more capacious framework for understanding the formation of the modern subject.

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