Death of the Revolting Man? On the Significance of Foucault’s Last Works in His Study of Subjectivity

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Abstract

Shortly before his death, Foucault published his last complete works: *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, volume two and three of his research on the history of sexuality. Again, these two books greatly surprised his readers. But this time the surprise has a different cause. It was no longer admiration or enchantment, as had been evoked by *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. Instead, people were frustrated and perplexed. After eight years’ waiting, what they faced now was two historical descriptions in a plain, straightforward style distinct from that of the previous two books. The reader could no longer see the sharp, subtle, subversive Foucault. This change of Foucault triggered new debates among critics on the perception of the Foucaultian subjectivity. Was Foucault old and inclined to reconcile with the society? Did these two books mark the anti-climactic ending of Foucault’s academic career? Did Foucault change his view on human subjectivation? Adopting a dialogical view about the Foucaultian idea of “freedom and determinism,” this paper will read these two books as a continuation of rather than a revision or rupture in Foucault’s genealogical study. Through this reading, this paper attempts to tackle and clarify some confused responses to Foucault’s investigation into human subjectivity and argues that, all along, Foucault has never denied the possibility of agency as some critics have claimed. Revolt is Foucault’s

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way of demonstrating human agency. Opposite to many people’s wrong perception of Foucault’s last books, the freedom granted to the Greek elite for the arts of existence is not true freedom in Foucault’s eyes. Instead of giving an example of a society of less subjugation of man, Foucault is describing another form of normalizing mechanism imposed on the subject.

**Key Words:** Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of Self*, subjectivity, determinism, genealogical study, agency, revolt
Shortly before his death, Foucault published his last complete works: *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, volume two and three of his research on the history of sexuality. Again, these two books greatly surprised his readers. But this time the surprise has a different cause. It was no longer admiration or enchantment, as had been evoked by *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality: Volume I*. Instead, people were frustrated and perplexed. After eight years’ waiting, what they faced now was two historical descriptions in a plain, straightforward style distinct from that of the previous two books. The reader could no longer see the sharp, subtle, subversive Foucault. This change of Foucault triggered new debates among critics on the perception of the Foucauldian subjectivity. Was Foucault old and inclined to reconcile with the society? Did these two books mark the anti-climactic ending of Foucault’s academic career? Did Foucault change his view on human subjectivation? Adopting a dialogical view about the Foucauldian idea of “freedom and determinism,” this paper will read these two books as a continuation of rather than a revision or rupture in Foucault’s genealogical study. Through this reading, this paper attempts to tackle and clarify some confused responses to Foucault’s investigation into human subjectivity and argues that, all along, Foucault has never denied the possibility of agency as some critics have claimed. Revolt is Foucault’s way of demonstrating human agency. Opposite to many people’s wrong perception of Foucault’s last books, the freedom granted to the Greek elite for the arts of existence is not true freedom in Foucault’s eyes. Instead of giving an example of a society of less subjugation of man, Foucault is describing another form of normalizing mechanism imposed on the subject.

1. Critical Response to Foucault’s Last Two Books: Hope versus Fatalism

To understand why *Pleasure* and *Care* caused such great debate, we cannot

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1 Hereafter, for convenience’s sake these two shall be abbreviated respectively as *Pleasure* and *Care* when referred to in this paper.

2 According to Stuart Elden (see Elden 25), the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* was subtitled *The Will to Knowledge* in its French edition. Hereafter, for convenience’s sake too, references to this book shall be abbreviated as *The Will to Knowledge* while *Discipline and Punish* as *Discipline*. 

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limit our focus to *The History of Sexuality* only. Instead, we need to broaden our view to include the whole of Foucault’s work. The first thing to understand is Foucault’s notion of genealogy, for it is central to our problem of subjectivation. Put in a simplest way, Foucault’s genealogy stresses the disruption rather than continuity of history. For him, the teleological or progressive development presented in the ordinary historiography is an arbitrary construction. History is full of “accidents”, “minute deviations” and “faulty calculations” (*Language* 146). As Foucault notes, “the search for descent is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (*Language* 147).

The next important point about Foucault within the framework of our discussion is to lay the project of the history of sexuality within the overall framework of Foucault’s study. This project can be seen as a further and concrete step Foucault took in his genealogical inquiry into subjectivity. In *The Will to Knowledge*, volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault tries to point out the importance of our recognizing sex as a political issue. Our notion about sexuality, Foucault argues, is but a “game of truth” wrought by the complicity of power and knowledge. Through “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms,” the modern man is cultivated to see him/herself as a desiring subject, which often needs self-reflection or investigation to assure its normality. Through an “analytics of power” Foucault wants to make people see the implicated relation between the “emphasis on the body” and “the process of growth and establishment of bourgeois hegemony” (125).

In volume two and three of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault goes back from modernity to the Antiquity and the first centuries of Christianity. *Pleasure* shows how “sexual activity and sexual pleasures were problematized through practices of the self, bringing into play the criteria of an ‘aesthetics of existence’” (*Pleasure* 12). In the Greek age the ethical concern over sexual conduct was not tied to the system of interdictions. Instead, it was an encouragement of self-mastering on the part of the elite class, which would help to refine one’s competence in the administration of
civil affairs. In turn in Care, Foucault describes how the arts of existence gradually
became the cultivation of the soul. The control over one’s sexual conduct now
cconcerned less one’s outer performance than the administration of one’s relation to
oneself. Temperance meant a path by which, “escaping all the dependences and
enslavements, one ultimately rejoins oneself, like a harbor sheltered from the
tempests or a citadel protected by its ramparts” (Care 65).

In the above description, it seems these three volumes are of a continuous
project. None of them deviates in subject or the inceptive assumption. Why is
there such great suspicion, then? The reason is perhaps threefold: one, the long
break of time between the first volume and the next two; two, the replacement of the
analytical argument by the flat, direct descriptions; and three, the apparent reverse of
theoretical assumption from the total permeation of sexual regulation in modern age
to the free choice in antiquity. A number of people who had been waiting to see
again the sharply anti-social Foucault are disappointed with Foucault’s change.
Foucault’s previous books have captivated them. Through the French scholar’s
analysis of the control imposed on man through the disciplinary institutions, such as
prison, school, and the army, and its implicated relation with power and knowledge,
these readers see for the first time the normalizing mechanisms in social practices or
systems. Foucault has unmasked for them the arbitrary regime of truth they have
formerly taken for granted. Yet with the big change in Foucault’s last books, they
feel they are betrayed. It seems that, after attracting so many admirers by his
subversive performance, Foucault suddenly retreats and ceases fire, leaving all his
followers at a loss. As Mark Poster points out (206-207), these readers argue that
the new books do not sustain the powerful argument developed in Discipline. In
their perception Foucault’s “splendid manoeuvre” that bypasses the theory of
repression in The Will to Knowledge is already abandoned. Foucault has burned up
all his subversive, insightful and critical spirit; what is left now is only its flat, even
unimaginative ember. People holding this attitude possess a proper knowledge of the former Foucault. Unfortunately they fail to catch the message Foucault conveys in the last two books.

In contrast, some others are happy to see Foucault’s new style. Roughly speaking, these people consist of two groups. The first can be called the “fatalist” group. Missing Foucault’s true point, they take the change in *Pleasure* and *Care* as a revision of the author’s account of human subjectivity. In their eyes, in both *Discipline* and *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault has denied all possibility of human agency. This fatalism upset them. It seems, from Foucault’s perspective, man is declared to be hopeless. We are but puppets controlled by unknown hands. What we do or we think are actually done or thought by someone else. And what most frustrates us is that there is no knowing who this someone is. Foucault, after messing up all our accepted or taken-for-granted social norms and institutions, withdrew himself and left us to grope in chaos. Now a thread of light is glimpsed. By presenting the Greek ethics of sex, Foucault finally admits human agency. Man, after all, is not so totally fragmented. As demonstrated in the ancient elite, man is capable of escaping social control and regulating his relation to self out of his own free will.

The other happy group is the more sophisticated readers, such as John Rajchman, W. Arthur Frank, T. J. Berard, Joan M. Reynolds and Stuart Elden. Rajchman takes Foucault’s turn in the last works as an admirable outcome of a long process of his inner struggle, which ends up with the revolt of the intolerable. In a more ambiguous tone, Berard reads Foucault’s change as an adjustment of the focus of his study. In Berard’s perception, in his earlier period Foucault lays more stress on the external force a society imposes on an individual in the formation of subjectivity. But in the later stage of his life, Foucault shifts his interest to “the

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3 In addition to Poster, Miller (326) also mentions the disappointment of certain readers, among whom Leo Bersani stands a well-known one.

4 About this see Foucault’s analysis of power in “The Subject and Power” and chapter one of *Discipline*. 
techniques the self, techniques by which individuals form themselves as subjects of certain practices, discourses, and rationalities” (203). In other words, the later Foucault is making attempt at a reformulation of his social theory by turning his eye from the external social mechanism to the individual’s relation to self after being formed into a subject. By contrast, Reynolds does not explicitly speak of a change in Foucault’s project of the research into the history of sexuality. Yet, his pointing out of the “pragmatic humanism” in Foucault’s later works reveals his acknowledgement of an adjustment of attitude toward the possibility of human freedom in later Foucault. Paralleling Foucault with John Dewey, Reynolds argues that Foucault’s idea of human freedom is not the essential one presumed by the Enlightenment. Instead, the individual is seen as “a contingent product of history, never completed, and thus lacking a human essence;” the creation of self is done in the “transformative ‘self-realization’” in historical context (956).

These scholars’ perceptive interpretations have inspired me a lot. Yet, it is somehow difficult for me to agree with their focus on Foucault’s change in his later life. In this paper, I will adopt Rajchman’s view in seeing Foucault’s wrings as an expression of his struggle against the intolerable in the social practices of self-constitution. But I do not agree that in *Pleasure* Foucault is displaying a larger freedom in the Greeks’ relation to self than that in modern people. Besides, Reynolds’s emphasis of the crucial role of corporeal and limit experience in the inquiry into practical-political system is close to my interpretation of the individual’s awakening to the regulation of one’s relation to self by external power as put forth by Foucault. As to the blind point in Reynolds’s argument, which also appears in that of many other scholars’, I will discuss it later in this paper.

In contrast, some other critics do not see any change or revision of thesis in Foucault’s last books. Again, this group includes two types of people. The first can be called the “indifferent” one. In fact, this type of people does not pay much attention to Foucault’s later writings. For them, Foucault is an irresponsible or inconsistent theorist. In Foucault’s works, they say, truth, liberty, and reason are mocked and social systems are challenged. Yet no solution or alternative is offered.
What is the point of Foucault’s undermining all the great values of humanism if he cannot provide any substitutive social value or system? If he has not in mind a particular vision or version of what an ideal human existence should be, what makes him to strike at the very beginning? In the eyes of this group of critics Foucault’s name stands for pessimistic fatalism. As they have been baffled or repulsed in the first place, the critical issue about the last two books is thus overlooked or ignored, since it is not the major concern.\(^5\)

The second type of the “non-change” group is what I take more interest in and what I will deal with in this paper. Readers of this stance, among them Mark Poster stands as a representative, have noticed the altered style in Foucault’s last books. Nevertheless, they do not see this change as Foucault’s revision or rectification of his former assumptions. Instead, they maintain that Foucault is continuing his genealogical study. In other words, they believe that Foucault never changes his conception about the fragmentation of man’s subject. And they do not feel anything wrong with the different style in Foucault’s later works. In their opinion, since Foucault’s research has entered a different phase and he is now giving the picture of sex in an epoch in which socialization of the subject has not come to such a deep and complex degree, it is natural that the style will not be so argumentative and problematizing as when he presents his thesis in *The Will to Knowledge*. Though this group is right in their argument of Foucault’s persistent concern about the fragmentation of man’s subject, their perception of Foucault’s last two books as descriptions of the lesser socialization of the subject needs reconsideration. It is my argument in this paper that, despite the leisured, easy-going tone, in *Pleasure* and *Care* Foucault is still cautioning people against social normalization of the subject. His true aim in these two books is to show that the freedom granted to the Greek

\(^{5}\) Lukes, Geertz (see Hoy’s commentary in “Power, Repression, Progress”), Habermas, Sajd, and Taylors can all be seen as belonging to this deprecating group. However, some admiring scholars, such as Falzon and Scott, also reveal this problem of arbitrary reading when they try to elaborate Foucault. Later in this paper, certain points of the above-mentioned scholars will be further explored.
elite for the arts of existence is not true freedom.

2. Is “the Death of Man” True?

Different as they are, the above-mentioned responses of critics center on one subject matter: man’s free will. These critics tend to take Foucault as pessimistic on the issue of human subjectivity in his earlier studies. The only difference is that, whereas some glimpse a new hope in the last two books, some do not. Yet they have all neglected one essential problem. How will they explain the contrast of Foucault’s dissenting voice to his picture of man as completely normalized when he writes *Discipline and Knowledge*? This contradiction explains the difficulty critics are confronted with when they try to fix the significance of *Pleasure and Care* in Foucault’s theoretical structure (and perhaps it also explains some other people’s willing negligence of the two books). Taken separately, *Care* and *Pleasure* are the easiest to read among Foucault’s books. But just because they disagree, in terms of either argument or style, so much with their predecessors, it becomes much harder to pin down their meanings. Added to the fact that they are part of an unfinished research project of which the author has already died, this difficulty appears more mysterious but at the same time also more worthy of exploration.

About the contradiction between Foucault’s passive picture of man and his strongly subversive writing tone, some people might say that Foucault himself never finds this self-contradiction until years later; that is why he makes certain modifications in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*. But this conjecture cannot be convincing, because, sensible as Foucault is, how can he be unaware of this big mistake? In this section I will argue that, first, Foucault’s being able to pose a critical view of the immanent power structure operating in the formation of one’s subjectivity does not contradict to his theory; rather, it gives the reader a crucial clue to the understanding of Foucault’s subject theory and the meaning of his

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6 Though both Berard and Elden mention Foucault’s realization of the lacking of “the needed theoretical tools” (Berard 207) in the later period of his life, they lay stress on Foucault’s attempt to find a new way to make his investigation into human subjectivity more comprehensive, rather than on his discovery of a mistake or blind point formerly ignored.
last two books as well.

A few perceptive critics’ discussion of early Foucault offers us a helpful point of departure in the exploration of this issue. David Couzens Hoy has pointed out that all along Foucault is aware of the contradiction his dissenting voice poses to his theory about the subjection of the entire social body to carceral techniques and normalizing tendencies. Indeed, if the social normalization were total, there would be no grounds for social criticism. How can Foucault utter such critiquing voice? Therefore, in Hoy’s opinion Foucault paints the picture of a totally normalized society not because he believes our present society is already one of such, but because he wants his readers to see the depth of the society’s mediation of one’s relation to self. Borrowed from Nietzsche, Foucault’s method is not to construct an alternative model, but to make us recognize his frustration and resentment, and, thereupon, to instill the motivation in us to criticize our current existence. This is the reason of Foucault’s engaging in the genealogical study, for he believes that the resistance to social developments can come only from within the society and from those places that have not been fully co-opted (14).

Christopher Falzon’s interpretation of Foucault’s work as presenting a dialogical dynamics of human subjectivity also contributes a lot in understanding Foucault’s attitude in his earlier genealogical study. Falzon, unlike other scholars, does not see Foucault’s “the death of Man” as destruction of all human agency. According to him, human cognition of the world is constituted by a reciprocal, back-and-forth interplay between self and the world. In seeking to order the world, we inevitably come up against that which is other, that which eludes our categorizations and that which is able to affect and shape us. Therefore, we break decisively from metaphysical thinking when we recognize that, although we struggle to domesticate and shape the world, the world can never be completely captured or wholly organized (4-5). This is the moment when resistance or transgression arises. It explains the reason why, although various forms of social order are imposed upon man, man will not simply be contented with reproduction of the forms of life in which he exists. He is able to resist imposed rules, to create new forms of thought.
and action, and, in turn, to impose them on others (10).

In Falzon’s opinion, Foucault’s work expresses the moment of this transgression. It implies his rejection of a foundationalist approach. His genealogical study is to help people recognize the finitude and historicity of our existence (9). His critique of the metaphysical subjectivity as is presented by Kant or Descartes is not aimed at belittling reason or seeing it in purely negative terms. Instead, he wants to expose the problem in the “absolutization of particular forms, and the consequent suppression of otherness, transgression and innovation through which new forms arise” (Falzon 49).

Hoy and Falzon’s readings have solved the contradiction shown in the coexistence of Foucault’s dissenting voice and his delineation of man’s deep subjugation in the modern society. This also invalidates the false assumption, including that of Rajchman, that Foucault does not avow or display human capability of agency until the last period of his life. However, both of the scholars talk on the epistemological level. They two never directly treat of the cause and form of Foucault’s revolt; that is to say, what, if we put it in Hoy’s way, makes Foucault “recognize his frustration and resentment, and thereby the motivation for criticism of the present” (The Will to Knowledge 14)? With this problem unsolved, it will be difficult to understand the meaning of Foucalt’s last two books.

3. Sexuality: Foucault’s Recoil from Ethics

T. J. Berard’s view of the Foucauldian subject as a dynamic product of history touches the above question. No doubt, Berard writes, Foucault rejects the Enlightenment “dominant, ahistorical, a priori conception of the subject” (207) and focuses on the role of power in the constitution of subjects. But the subject constituted by the external social mechanisms does not completely miss its agency. Though a historical construct of power, the subject is active. It still retains its capability of revolt. As Berard sees it:

Foucault focuses in “the role of power in the constitution of active subjects, the way in which individuals actively constitute themselves
and assert themselves as subjects of and subject to various rationalities and practices such as are embodied in conscience and self-knowledge, at the most general level, and the deployment of ‘sexuality’ in particular.

(208)

Berard’s discussion is important in his pointing out the paradoxical role of power in maintaining the revolting strength in the subject. In turn, Charles E. Scott’s inquiry of Foucault’s recoil from ethics helps us go one step further in knowing what triggers Foucault’s critique of subjectivation. In Scott’s analysis, as a group of principles for both conduct and value judgment, ethics is the leading force in the process of the formation of man’s identity, that is, his forms of relation with self. However, this process is not an even and predetermined one. Recoil arises when structures of values clash to cause suppression and suffering. The guiding suspicion is that “the self-determination of our culture makes inevitable the suffering and destruction to which it is insensitive” (Scott 5). Motivated by a desire to recognize and mitigate the violence and oppressive anxieties that are constitutive of self-forming values, the subject will start questioning the values and concepts that have rule-governing and axiomatic power in our culture. He will want to learn “to become alert to exclusions and to forgotten aspects in a people’s history, to overhear what is usually drowned out by the predominant values, to rethink what is ordinarily taken for granted” (7).

In Scott’s perception, Foucault’s genealogical work is an embodiment of this recoil from ethics. Foucault steps away from himself through reflection on the forms of relation with self, on the methods and techniques by which he forms himself. This distancing is neither opposition to nor departure from the given self-relations. His intention is to break the totality that characterizes the formation of self and the power inherent in the formation. In doing so, his aim is not to suggest any particular solution but rather to provide a space for diverse practices (Scott 54-55).

The above two scholars’ interpretations offer us an important clue to track down the issue in discussion now. Obviously, the suppressive anxiety social normalizing
mechanisms invoke in the individual leads Foucault to revolt against the Enlightenment humanitarian universalism pervading cultural practices and to reflect on the forms of relation with self. Yet, why is sexuality his investigations center on among the various methods and techniques by which one forms oneself? And what does this mean for our understanding of *Pleasure* and *Care*? Berard and Scott have helped a lot with our understanding of Foucault’s philosophy but they fail to address these two central questions.

Though it is often seen as problematic to use biographical information as evidence for solving research issues, here James Miller’s observation does offer a side glimpse into Foucault’s mind in shifting his attention to sexuality. According to Miller, Foucault’s deep concern with the bodily suppression imposed on the individual in the process of self-formation is closely related to his own sexual tendency. Since his young age Foucault had continually suffered from the anxiety about his homosexual desire. Perhaps owing to this reason, he was greatly interested in the topic about body or sex. In Ecole Normale, he achieved a rare in-depth knowledge of Marquis de Sade, and was contemptuous of those who were not adepts (Miller 45). He had also studied different approaches to the mind-body problem with Merleau-Ponty. However, it seems his study did not help him much, for one night in 1948 a teacher who rounded a corner by chance found a young man lying on the ground. The youth had just slashed his chest with a razor. The Ecole Normale’s doctor attributed Foucault’s suicidal behavior to distress over his homosexuality. This cause is tacitly agreed by Didier Eribon, his French biographer, who depicts the young philosopher as paralyzed with guilt after his frequent nocturnal forays into the gay *demimonde* of postwar Paris. This was Foucault’s first attempt to commit suicide. Over the next few years, more suicide attempts followed.7 During this period obviously Foucault experienced moments of madness. As Foucault himself put it:

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7 About Foucault’s suicidal attempts, see Miller, p. 53-55.
It was finally to be chained to the humiliation of being an object for himself. Awareness was now linked to the shame of being identical to this other, of being compromised in him, and of already despising oneself before being able to recognize or to know oneself. (qtd. in Miller 54)

From this perspective one will have a new understanding of the evolution of Foucault’s interest in his research work. *Madness and Civilization* is the product of Foucault’s psychoanalytic studies that had started since 1951. This work marks Foucault’s struggle to overcome the anxiety caused by his homosexual desire. Obviously at this time Foucault had not discovered what dominates the subjectivation of self and was not yet successful in formulating a proper theory about the relation with self, though Foucault himself mentions in this book that what concerned him was already the problem of subjectivity. Suicide signals his desperate way of terminating his difficult relation with self. But things were different a few years later. In the 1979 essay on suicide he formulated an unusual aesthetics of suicide. Protesting that suicide was “the simplest of pleasure,” Foucault imagined “suicide-festivals” and “suicide-orgies” for which one ought to prepare “bit by bit, decorate it, arrange the details, find the ingredient, imagine it . . .” (qtd. in Miller 55). At this time it seems Foucault had to some extent liberated himself from the social subjugation and was at ease about his own body.

The 1968 movement played a crucial role in Foucault’s change. The failure of the movement seemed to wake him up to politics. He gradually found out the predominance of power in every aspect of the shaping or forming of self. In 1971 Foucault started a research called GIP\(^8\), because he and his colleagues wished to gather information about the deplorable conditions inside French prisons (Miller 187). “Prison is the only place where power is manifested in its naked state, and where it is justified as moral force,” Foucault explained in 1972 (qtd. in Miller

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\(^8\) Prison Information Group (in French: Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons or GIP), a project to provide a way for prisoners to voice their concerns.
In 1975 *Discipline* was published as a report on this prison research. In it Foucault describes how self is shaped into forms by “the political investment of the body” (*Discipline* 25). Through various forms of regulation, the society makes itself to be a disciplinary one where “each individual subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour . . .” (*Discipline* 304). In a word, with its “carceral network” of “systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation,” power invests human bodies and subjugates them by turning them into objects of knowledge (*Discipline* 28; 304). It is here that Foucault realized human subject as “an ensemble or collection of corporeal forces” (Falzon 44). This research also inspired Foucault on the entangled relation between power and knowledge. He found out what he had been doing without knowing: “When I think back now” Foucault recollected in the 1977 interview, “I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilization* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power?” (*Power/Knowledge* 115).

Then it seems natural that Foucault’s next book after *Discipline* came out as a report on his research into the history of sexuality: it stands for his continued inquiry into the social subjugation of body in the sexual aspect. In 1976 Foucault published *The Will to Knowledge*.9 As Miller describes, Daniel Defert, Foucault’s life-long partner, remembered being startled. It seems “on the very day that Foucault completed the last draft of *Discipline* he began writing his next book, the first volume of his *The History of Sexuality* (241).

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9 T. J. Berard’s reading can help illuminate this aspect in Foucault’s research. In his paper, Berard mentions “several points at which Foucault identifies what might be fruitful directions for liberatory struggles. One passage from the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, which clearly suggests a basis and direction for liberatory struggles is the following:

It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasure, and knowledge, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex desire, but bodies and pleasures. (157)
In addition to the external circumstances, we also have the author’s assurance as our proof. Foucault himself reminded people of the continuity between *Discipline* and *The Will to Knowledge* in his investigation of subjectivation. The books are not as different as they seem, Foucault explained. Whereas *Discipline* was an effort to “produce a genealogy of modern morals through a political history of bodies” (qtd. in Miller 241), *The Will to Knowledge* aimed at exposing the thoroughness of social normalization. As the French philosopher argues, “the human body was entering a machinery of power that digs into it, breaks it down and rearranges it—transforming, inevitably, the experience of sexuality as well” (qtd. in Miller 241; italics mine).

On the surface, it seems that Foucault’s attention to the social construction of sexuality was inspired by the importance of the corporeal existence of man disclosed in *Discipline*. Nevertheless, the order in actuality is the reverse. As Miller shows, before writing *Discipline* Foucault had been doing research on the history of sexuality for many years, collecting extensive materials, piling up voluminous rough drafts (251). Given the French philosopher’s anxiety over his homosexuality, the direction of this project of research was expectable.

4. The Continuing Project in the Three Volumes of *History of Sexuality*

Now that the possibility of human agency and the role of sexuality in Foucault’s subject theory are clarified, in this section I will argue that the three volumes of *History of Sexuality* are a continuing whole. I will also argue that in *Pleasure* and *Care* Foucault does not mean to show the lesser social subjugation of the individual in the ancient period; on the contrary, Foucault is alerting his readers to the danger of seeing the freedom granted to the Greek elite for the arts of existence as true freedom. In other words, the ancient Greek elite is not a group exempted from social normalization. All along, Foucault has been demonstrating the capability of human agency through his illustrations of the formerly unaware normalization of the subject done by cultural practices. This time it is again a work of this type. If the language appears less subversive and more relaxed, it is due to the different character
of the mechanism of subjugation: freedom instead of discipline. If the reader is led by the apparent tranquility into believing that Foucault is giving a different picture of man, they fail to understand the true Foucault.

A big cause of the mistaken perception of *Pleasure* and *Care* is people’s way of seeing the development of Foucault’s subject theory. No matter what ground they base their readings on, generally people separate Foucault’s work into three stages. Including *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *Madness and Civilization* (1965), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), the first stage of Foucault’s study focused on knowledge. The second stage, which produced *Discipline* (1975) and *The Will to Knowledge* (1976), discussed the normative collection of rules. The last stage, pointing to *Pleasure* and *Care* published simultaneously in 1984 shortly before Foucault died, took self as its topic (Hoy 3). Unlike these people, Rajchman has a very different way of division. He does not separate *Discipline* or *The Will to Knowledge* from the later two volumes of *History of Sexuality*. Instead, he regards all the four books as belonging to the same period in Foucault’s self-development, a period which constituted the “writing in difficulty” in the last decade of Foucault’s life.

Perhaps someone will protest by saying that dividing does not signify much; different periodizations are different tools for understanding Foucault’s major concern in a certain phase of his life. It might be so but it might be not. There is nothing to criticize if the separation is simply done for marking each different subject matter Foucault was dealing with at different time. However, if different ways of dividing suggest different perceptions of Foucault about human subjectivity, we will need to be careful. As I have mentioned before, most of those who perceive a change in Foucault’s last two books mistakenly assume that Foucault has formerly

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10 Some of them take the shift of Foucault’s self-understanding as vacillations while some of them take it as Foucault’s learning from his mistakes at the same time when he followed a central theme.

11 The year in the parenthesis after each book refers to its original publication year in France, though the translated English title is used. Of these books, *Madness and Civilization* was written first though published later.
believed man’s hopelessness in social subjugation and he now discovers the once-existent free subject in the elite of the ancient time. The subject in his final portrayal is no longer such a passive product of society’s normalizing rules as is presented in *Discipline*. Yet, if we learn from Rajchman and take Foucault’s last decade to be a whole phase, we will not fall into such trap. We will know that, if a certain perceptive evolution has taken place in Foucault’s later life, it is before rather than after the writing of *The Will to Knowledge*. And we will also know that this change is an advancement in rather than a reformation of his former theories.

In his *Truth and Eros: Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics*, Rajchman explores the evolution in Foucault’s perception of human subjectivity indicated in his struggle for a new style of writing. Rajchman reminds us that this problem is important because, at least in Foucault’s case, writing books would not be simply a way of expressing himself, but would form a part of his ways of living (6). Each book marks an attempt of Foucault to get away from previous experiences to make a new start. To elucidate the fusion of thought (*pensee*) and ways of living in Foucault, Rajchman cites Gilles Deleuze’s picturing of the “crisis of all orders, political, vital, philosophical” this French thinker has gone through. However, the source of this series of crisis comes not from a moral fault, a methodological doubt, a bad faith, or a neurosis. As Rajchman emphasizes, precipitated by the experience of “the intolerable” in conditions of life, each of Foucault’s new start in his book signifies not “a remembering of where he had gone astray, but of an anamnesis of what he had been unable to see in what he had been doing and thinking (14). Among these struggles for new perceptions, the “writing in difficulty” of the last decade of Foucault’s life “remains at once the most intimate and the most free part of his work,” though it is the one people have known “the least what to make of, or what to do with, the part that is the least classifiable, the most up for grabs” (Rajchman 7).

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12 Quoted originally from Gilles Deleuze, *Poupalers* (Minuit, 1990), p. 116. Here it is in Rajchman, p. 5.
In Rajchman’s analysis, Foucault was seeking “a new ‘erotic’ after Desire” in his last research. He wanted to restore to Eros “its sense of improbability, innovation, the beauty of unguided ‘experimentation’” (Rajchman 98). Foucault did so because he was fed up with the morality of asceticism prescribed by the philosophical tradition “from Descartes to Husserl.” He could no longer bear the self-relation based on the ascetic assumption that the subject is something we can reject in the name of an ideal of rationality (9). Naturally, Foucault set his eyes on the problematization of human beings as a desiring subject. As Rajchman observes:

> It is not entirely fortuitous that Foucault’s search for a new style in the subjectivity of critical thought coincided with his research into the history of what we call our “sexuality.” For sexual, passionate, erotic experience is a domain in which the refusal of asceticism has been particularly pronounced. It is here that the finger of suspicion about asceticism has been especially pointed, its illnesses most diagnosed, the social and political consequence surrounding it most clear. (11)

To do so Foucault first needed to free himself from the psychoanalytical perspective. Foucault found that, based upon an assumption of a truth of our Eros, psychoanalysis would fail to see the historical construction in subjectivity and make us believe that who we are is determined by an order or a fatality (107).

About Foucault’s change of perception when working on Knowledge, Miller’s explanation, though somehow reductive and verging on sensationalism, offers us some supplementary evidences to Rajchman’s observation. According to Miller, in 1975 Foucault’s long preparation for the investigation into the history of sexuality was nearly finished. He already started writing about it. At this time he went to California for the first time. When he returned to Paris in June, he set aside the voluminous rough drafts for the first volume of The History of Sexuality. Ignoring the mountain of manuscript he had already completed, he threw himself into writing a small essay on his methodology in this research. This essay later became the last
chapter of *The Will to Knowledge*. That is to say, after this visit Foucault abandoned his former effort and was starting it over (251-252). The topic stood still the same, but the perception already altered. What happened in California to cause this great change?

In Miller’s opinion, Foucault’s “kaleidoscope” has dramatically shifted in California in the spring of 1975. Two things precipitated this shift. One was his experience of gay liberation in San Francisco, especially the S/M movement. Foucault was amazed at the creative vitality in it. He later told Gallagher and Wilson that people through S/M are inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their body—through the eroticization of the body. I think it’s a kind of creation, a creative enterprise, which as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure. The idea that bodily pleasure should always come from sexual pleasure. (qtd. In Miller 263)

This sexual experience, Miller concludes, has imbued Foucault “not only with a new understanding of his sexuality but also with a new feeling of power” (284).

The second important event that caused Foucault’s change took place in Death Valley. Professor Wade took him there. After they arrived, Wade gave him two or three pills of LSD, a type of narcotic, for experiencing the obliteration of self. A while later, Wade remembered, Foucault began to sense “strange vistas, like visions of new life.” Trying to describe his feelings, the philosopher conjured up the image of another kind of “limit-experience,” one that had become routine for him in the previous weeks in San Francisco. “The only thing I can compare this experience to in my life is sex with a stranger,” he says. After that, Foucault fell into a long silence. At last he spoke again, “I am very happy,” with tears streaming down his cheeks, “Tonight I have understood my sexuality” (qtd. in Miller 250-251). After so many years, the sexually-afflicted philosopher finally liberated himself from the social normalization and “desexualized” himself.

In addition to being too personal, Miller’s interpretation misses one important
event in Foucault’s intellectual career: the writing of *Discipline*. Without the understanding of power gained from this former study, Foucault will not be so “illuminated” by these two events. Maybe we can say that since the years in Ecole Normale, the homosexual anxiety had given the French thinker the experience of the intolerable. After endeavoring for so many years, Foucault was now ready to fight back.

If Rajchman’s and Miller’s explanations tend toward speculative and appear inadequate in some people’s eyes, Elden’s analysis is solid enough though at first sight he seems to argue for the opposite side. Utilizing newly published Foucault’s lecture courses, Elden declares that Foucault’s last writings detoured from his original plan. Yet he dismisses Miller’s interpretation of Foucault’s change as a result from his California trip. In his opinion, Foucault changed his project radically between the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*, which appeared in December 1976, and the second *The Use of Pleasure* and the third *The Care of the Self*, published in May and June 1984 respectively. A clue Elder uses to support his argument is the initial plan Foucault set up for his project. He notes that on the back cover of the first volume, Foucault gave the following titles:

*La Volonté de savoir* [The Will to Knowledge]

*La Chair et le corps* [The Flesh and the Body]

*La Croisade des enfants* [The Children’s Crusade]

*La Femme, la mere et l’hystérique* [The Woman, The Mother, and the Hysteric]

*Les Pervers* [The Perverse]

*Population et races* [Population and Races]

According to Elden, when Foucault used the proliferation and immanence of sexual discourse in Victorian society to protest the stereotypical impression of seeing sexuality as taboo in the first volume, Foucault discovered the central role of confession in the formation of the individual into the subject of sexuality. Sex in that age is not something you hide but something that you confess (Elden 26). In Foucault’s description, confession is
an act by which the subject, in an affirmation of that which they are, binds themselves to his truth, places themselves in a relation of dependence towards the other and at the same time modifies the connection that they have to themselves.\footnote{13 Cited from Foucault, \textit{L’ Hermeneutique du sujet: Cours au Collège de France (1973-1974)}, ed. Frédéric Gros, Seuil/Gallimard, Paris: 2001, p. 353 n. 22; here qtd. in Elden, p. 30.}

Elden argues that, as the above list of titles shows, what Foucault had in mind was the plan to track down sexuality’s four constituent subjects: the hysterical woman, the masturbatory child, the Malthusian couple and the perverse adult. These studies all centered upon the axis of the understanding of the flesh as distinct from the body. These were studies Foucault aimed to publish at the rate of one a year. The whole project will be one on “history of confession since the Middle Ages, which would include study of judicial confession, particularly the inquisition; the penitential confession; and the confession of sins against the sixth and ninth commandments (Elden 26). However, Elden says, after Foucault came back from his sabbatical leave in 1977, a sign of change already emerged.

Elden’s description of this change of Foucault is a long passage, but its importance makes me incumbent to quote it almost at its full length:

From articles, lectures and interviews published at the time it is clear that Foucault was working back much further historically than he had originally intended. In January 1978 he was again working on the volume on Christianity, and was concerned with matters such as concupiscence and the council of Trent. But his version was, as Foucault’s partner Daniel Defert reports, completely destroyed. According to Defert’s chronology, in January 1979 this “history of confession” was leading him to study the first great texts of Cassian, Augustine, Tertullian, and this was leading to the “progressive birth of new subject material for the second volume,” now under the title of \textit{Les Aveux de la chair}. Rather than beginning his inquiry into confession with the late Middle Ages, Foucault was going back to the early Church Fathers. In April 1978 he suggests that the departure point is at least
since Saint Augustine, since the first centuries of Christianity; and as Carrette notes, as early as 1977 Foucault was already ‘grappling with Tertullian and the church in late antiquity in preparation for such a volume’ . . . By the early 1980s Foucault seems to have finished this investigation into early Christian understandings of confession and subjectivity. . . . There are many places in the 1982 lecture series L’Herméneutique du sujet that refer back to these previous courses, and to that earlier research more generally. . . . However, Foucault claims that the introduction to the volume he had at this time [“Sexuality and Solitude,” which touched upon Augustine, appeared in 1981] rested upon a number of clichés about pagan ethics (i.e. Greece and Rome), which were misleading, based as they were on generalizations in the secondary literature. Turning back again, he wanted to sort out his view of the earlier period before he published this book on Christianity. That, it seems, is what led Foucault into those earlier periods—material on which first started to appear in his lectures in 1981. (30)

One important thing to clear up is that, when Elden speaks of Foucault’s detour from his original plan and his radical change in his last writings, he means the different object Foucault chose for his studies rather than a renovation in Foucault’s conception. That is why Elden calls this change “a productive failure” (23). Obviously, Foucault had a grand project on the study of sexuality. His original plan was to track down the confessional mechanisms that shaped the sexual subject in the Middle Ages. But his discontent with the “clichés about pagan ethics” forced him to turn to the earlier period—the Antiquity portrayed in Pleasure and Care. That is why Elden mentions earlier on that “in 1980-1981 Foucault’s overall trajectory of study became clear again, as Foucault started to look at Christianity again, and antiquity in detail for the first time” (29), and also why he concludes at the end of this section: “It would seem, after many years going further and further back that he still thought he could return to the original period of Christianity he had been concerned with” (33; italics mine). Clearly, it is Foucault’s aim to show that the self-mastering the ancient Greek elite displayed is still inside the framework of social regulation of the individual’s relation to self.
5. Freedom in Revolt

Given the above mapping of the development of Foucault’s concern in his investigation into human subjectivation, the meaning of *Please* and *Care* becomes clear now. If Foucault acknowledges the existence of human agency, it is displayed in revolt rather than in freedom. For Foucault, revolt will (re)create the meaning of existence for the subject, because “it is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but of whomever) introduces itself into history and gives it the breath of life. . . . It is due to such voices that the time of men does not have the form of an evolution, but precisely that of a history.”14 It is also revolt that permits human freedom. As Foucault emphasizes, “rather than speaking of an essential freedom, it would be better to speak of an ‘agonism,’ . . . a permanent provocation” (“Afterword” 222).

From this perspective, we know that the freedom granted to the Greek elite for the arts of existence is not true freedom in Foucault’s eyes. As Falzon argues, Foucault was far from simply endorsing or romanticizing the Greek form of reflective activity. Foucault turned to the Greeks “in order to examine the earliest forms of these practices of the self” (65). What interested him was simply that, “in contrast to the present situation, these are practices of the self which are not required of individuals as part of the process of their political subordination” (Falzon 65).

Foucault’s words also validate Falzon’s interpretation. When speaking of his theory about the subject, Foucault stresses, “I don’t think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject that one could find everywhere. . . . I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more anonymous ways, *through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity . . .*” (italics mine).15 Foucault’s words show clearly that the practices of the ancient Greeks are but “techniques of the self”

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(Pleasure 11) in another form. He talks about the Greek culture not because he assumes that it is better than ours, but because he wants to link them to “a group of practices that have been of unquestionable importance in our society” (Pleasure 10). Actually Foucault has explicitly claimed: “these texts serve as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects” (Pleasure 13). Since Foucault repeatedly stresses that he wants to show us how to “think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known” (Pleasure 9), how can he contradict himself by applauding the Greek practice as a demonstration of man’s freedom?

From the above, it can be seen clearly that in effect Foucault has managed to show to himself and his readers his capability of revolt in 1975 and 1976 when he seemed to paint the total subjection of man. But then there remains the final question: why is there such a long break if Pleasure and Care do not separate from The Will to Knowledge in either the assumption or direction of Foucault’s theory of subjectivation? In my opinion the time gap is not surprising. As Elden has showed in his paper, the antiquity is an unfamiliar field by which Foucault felt greatly baffled. Added to the scarcity of materials, to tackle this period would consume formidable scholarships. Actually, as mentioned before, when Foucault first tried to write about the history of sexuality, it was already many years’ preparation and the effort still turned out to be a failure. Also, Foucault’s remark on the practice of confession in the Middle Ages as well as the Greeks’ notion of sex as an initiation in The Will to Knowledge (58-59) proves that Foucault already conceived his project of research in that early stage.

Moreover, although the language of the last two volumes of The History of Sexuality is straightforward and plain, it does not mean that Foucault lost his combative character. His alternative way of interpreting those historical materials is itself a subversion of tradition. This is what distinguishes Foucault from others. It is pretty much probable that Foucault’s change of writing style is a purposeful

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16 See note 14.
move for surprising everyone, including himself. If we consider Foucault’s continuous attempt to get away from the present, this guess will not seem unreasonable. Isn’t it Foucault who said that “to write a book is in a certain way to abolish the preceding one”? Here this abolishing does not necessarily mean the relinquishing of one’s initial theses or assumptions. Rather it could mean the author’s constant effort in the renewal of self-expression. For a scholar who looked after the “limit experience” all the time, this discursive self-revolution would have been tempting. At least one thing is certain. The plain language of the two books is not, as many people have surmised, an omen of Foucault’s exhaustion of vitality. This can be proved by the fact that in 1982 and 1983 he returned twice to San Francisco and was again entranced by the “overwhelming” and “unspeakable” possibilities of S/M (Miller 27).

Over these years, *Pleasure* and *Self* never received their due attention. People either ignored them or were disappointed with them. They paid most attention to *Discipline* or *The Will to Knowledge*. For them, the two books are the most entrancing in Foucault. However, they seem to forget that, without the supplementation of the succeeding descriptions, Foucault’s genealogical project will be an incomplete one. As Foucault’s subtitle shows, *The Will to Knowledge* is simply an introduction. We only get the basic hypothesis. How will we see “the different modes by which human beings are made subjects” (qtd. in Scott 55) if we never know different practices in different times? How can we assess Foucault’s assumption that “each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (*Power/Knowledge* 131), if he does not present the different ways that society shapes its individual into form? That is why, as showed in this paper, I argue that Foucault’s last two books are a continuation of rather than a disruption in his genealogical research, which signifies his revolt against society’s normalization of the subject.

17 Originally in *Foucault Live*, p. 303; here it is quoted from Rajchman, p. 6.
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反抗者之死？論傅科最後兩本作品在其主體研究上的意義

周淑娟

摘 要

就在辭世不久前，傅科（Foucault）发表了《性史》（The History of Sexuality）系列的第二與第三冊：《快感的享用》（The Use of Pleasure）和與《自我的呵護》（The Care of the Self）兩本書。這兩本書再次引起了廣大的震撼。然而這次引起迴響的原因卻不似早先《規訓與懲罰》（Discipline and Punish）與性史第一冊出版時般是因激賞而起。相反地，傅科的讀者這次感受到的是挫敗與迷惘。在八年的等待之後，讀者看到的是兩本風格平鋪直敘、文字平淡無奇的歷史性描述。往昔思緒敏銳、文字細膩但又充滿顛覆性格的傅科已不復可見。傅科如此出人意表的轉變在學術界對其主體學說的討論開啓了新的爭議。是否傅科晚年老朽，失去了與社會抗爭的活力？這兩本書是否揭示了這位充滿爭議性的法國思想家社會批判生涯的反高潮？抑或傅科改變了他對人類主體化過程的看法？本論文以傅科學說中主體自由與決定論的概念為辯證主軸，強調這位法國思想家一路走來，立場始終如一；他的最後兩本書並未如某些研究者所言，是對他先前主體學說提出修正，更不似其他研究者所說，傅科晚年的立場與先前大相逕庭。相反地，傅科自始自終都在揭示自我主宰的可能性，而抗爭便是傅科展現主體自由的途徑。與許多人的看法大為不同的是，傅科最後兩本書並不是藉由描述上古時期人類不受社會約制，自主地調整身體與自我關係的狀態；相反地，他仍在原有的主體學說框架內，勾勒人類社會另一種建構主體的機制。藉此研究，本論文希望對傅科主體學說中眾說紛紜的若干概念加以梳理並有所澄清。

關鍵詞：傅科，《性史》，《快感的享用》，《自我的呵護》，主體化過程，決定論，自我主宰，抗爭

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