Foucault, Levinas and the Ethical Embodied Subject

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Summary of the Dissertation
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This dissertation attempts to interrogate whether the postmodern anti-essentialist approach to the body can truly recognize the ethical value of the body. For the postmodernists, the value of the human body has long been repressed by Cartesian rationalism and dualism that privileges the mind over the body. Dualism is a form of reductionism that reduces either the mind to the body or the body to the mind. It not only fails to recognize an interaction between mind and body, but also privileges one side at the expense of the other. For instance, rationalism is a dualist reductionism since it always explains the body and matter in terms of mind or reason. Thus, dualism not only refers to a split or separation between mind and body, but also refers to a reductive relation between mind and body.

Furthermore, the postmodernists argue that the essentialist and dualist understanding of the body is a form of manipulation that reduces the body to a manipulated object. Inspired by a social constructivist approach to the body, the postmodernists argue that the body does not have any pre-given or transcendent essence; rather the body is simply a socially and culturally constructed product. Many influential contemporary feminists or queer theorists, such as Monique Wittig, Judith Butler or Elizabeth Grosz, have adopted such a social constructivist approach to “deconstruct” various kinds of essentialist understandings of the body. They stress that giving the gendered body an “essence” or “ontological nature” is to impose power towards those who have an alternative bodily and sexual identity distinct from the dominant sexual culture.

For the postmodern constructivists, any ontological understandings of body, which give the body a pre-given nature, are unethical because they mask the fact that the body is simply a socially constructed body and negate the singularity of body. Thus, the aim of body politics, for some postmodernists such as Butler, is to “deconstruct” different ontological understandings of the body, then “reconstruct” the alternative symbolic style for the body. The body is simply a style and sign, not a being: the body has no ontological status. Simply, the social constructivists’ political strategy is an aesthetic subversion of repressive gender culture through symbolically styling one’s body.

But this dissertation will question that is stylization of one’s bodily identity an unconditional act? In fact, one’s subversive bodily identity is not necessarily ethical
that might generate violent act towards the other. Thus we should think of how stylization of one's bodily identity can yield a subversive, responsible and ethical bodily act. But most social constructivists fail to take into account an ethics of bodily subversion.

Furthermore, some social constructivists simply regard stylization of body as a construction of the cultural meaning of the body: the body is reduced to cultural sign. While I agree that changing the symbolic dimension of one’s body can subvert some repressive cultural boundaries, I do not agree that only a transformation of the cultural meaning of the body can subvert repressive boundaries. Rather I believe that the body per se, which includes one’s bodily gesture, suffering face and bodily sensation, can also yield a subversive or even ethical meaning.

Of course, not all social constructivists ignore the subversive element of one’s bodily sensation. In fact, some social constructivists do treat the bodily pleasure as a “force” or “strategy” to subvert the social norms so as to achieve one’s autonomy. While I agree that some social constructivists do recognize the subversive meaning of the pleasure, they do not pay enough attention to the ethical meaning of pain and suffering, which can cultivate a sense of responsibility for the subject.

This dissertation will pose a challenge to the social constructivists that if “liberation of pleasure” is the telos of body politics, this might cultivate a pleasure-driven egoist subject who is indifferent to the suffering of others. Moreover, this dissertation will further question: how the social constructivists can ensure that their pleasure-seeking subjects can take care of the other? Is bodily transformation an unconditional transformation? Can stylization of the body be ethical? In addition to pleasure, can other bodily sensations become a subversive and ethical force to subvert repressive boundaries?

Thus, in response to the social constructivists’ problems, this dissertation will focus on Foucault and Levinas’ notion of an ethical embodied subject. In fact, Foucault’s theory of body deeply inspires contemporary body politics. Foucault inspires the social constructivists’ claim that one’s body is socially constructed by culture, and stylization of self is the only way to achieve a freedom of life. However, stylization of the body, for Foucault, is not an unconditional act, as the social constructivists believe; rather it aims at cultivating a unique and autonomous ethical subject that not only takes care of oneself but also takes care of the other. Of course, as this dissertation will show that Foucault’s approach to the embodied subject, which
merely treats the subject as a "pleasure-driven subject," cannot limit one's egoism in 
one's bodily stylization.

Thus, in response to the second problem, this dissertation will argue that 
Levinas' ethical embodied subject can provide a solution to Foucault's problem. For 
Levinas, the subject cannot become an ethical subject without an irresistible 
intervention by the other because only the other can limit one's egoist mentality. 
Furthermore, Levinas argues that it is the sense of suffering, not the sense of pleasure, 
that makes one ethical: one's sense of responsibility towards the other can only be 
aroused through one's empathetic bodily relationship with another fragile body. Thus, 
this dissertation will argue that Levinas' ethical embodied subject can transform 
Foucault and social constructivists' subject into a mourning subject, a truly ethical 
subject.

Of course, this does not mean that Foucault's ethical embodied makes no 
contribution to the making of an ethical embodied subject after the critique of 
Cartesian dualism. Thus, this dissertation will compare the strength and weakness of 
Foucault and Levinas’ ethical embodied subjectivity to see how they can complement 
each other so that a more comprehensive notion of ethical embodied subject is 
formulated.

In this dissertation, I shall discuss the later Foucault's writings *History of 
Sexuality II* and *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and the later Levinas' writing *Otherwise 
than Being*, which have given us a constructive and in-depth approach to the ethical 
embodied subject. In chapter one, I shall outline the theoretical and ethical problems 
of contemporary postmodern constructivists' approach to the body. Then I shall show 
the relevance of Foucault and Levinas' notion of the ethical embodied subject with 
respect to the contemporary philosophical and cultural discussions on body and ethics. 
In particular, I shall argue why is Foucault and Levinas' notion of ethical embodied 
subject more relevant than Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and Taylor's notion of 
embodied subject in response to the ethical problems of contemporary body politics.

In chapter two, I shall outline the late Foucault's notion of ethical embodied 
subject. Although Foucault is commonly regarded as an anti-moral social 
constructivist, this chapter will argue that inspired by a flexible form of ancient Greek 
embodied ethics, the later Foucault fully affirms one's ethical formation through 
stylizing one's bodily life that can make one take care of the other through taking 
caring of oneself. In addition, while Foucault is commonly regarded as a genealogist 

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who views all discourses of truth as a repressive discourse, this chapter will argue that the later Foucault fully affirms an embodied truth that stems from the ancient Greek embodied philosophy. In other words, Foucault does not reject all discourses of morality and truth; rather what he rejects is a form of morality and truth that negates the body. Finally, this chapter will argue that Foucault does not treat stylization of self as simply a symbolic subversion. Rather, he believes that one’s bodily stylization not only transgresses some repressive boundaries but also forms an ethical embodied life that respects the self and the other’s life.

In chapter three, I will explore Levinas’ notion of ethical embodied subject. This chapter will argue that while Levinas criticizes rationalism and essentialism, his anti-essentialism and anti-rationalism do not eliminate an ethical ground for defending the dignity of human beings. Levinas reconstructs a new ethical embodied subject for whom sensation, not consciousness, is a primordial way to connect with the other. Since the ethical embodied subject can directly sense the suffering of the other, this can enable the subject to build up an ethical relationship with the other.

However, the subject, for Levinas, is not ethical in itself. The subject can become ethical only through the intervention of the other. It is not the subject’s will that motivates the subject to take any ethical actions towards the other; rather it is the infinite other that motivates the subject to take an ethical action. Thus, Levinas argues that ethics is also about an intersubjective embodied relationship where the subject and other’s bodies are unconditionally exposed for each other. And it is this risky exposure of bodily life that makes possible an ethical embodied subject and diverts the subject from a self-centered life to an other-centered life. Thus, for Levinas, the other, the physical body and bodily sensation are the essential conditions for building up a truly ethical subjectivity.

In chapter four, I shall make a comparison of Foucault and Levinas’ ethical embodied subject. This chapter will argue that although Foucault and Levinas have different directions and understandings of being ethical, both of them assert the importance of the body as the essential condition to rebuild an ethical subjectivity after the critique of rationalism; both of them rediscover the ethical potentiality of the body, which they think is repressed by Western rationalism; and both of them agree that ethics is about a fundamental relationship between the subject and the other. I shall argue that their notion of ethical embodied subject can show us the ethical value of the body after modernity.
Of course, Foucault and Levinas understand one’s ethical formation in different ways. For Foucault, ethical subjectivity can be attained without the intervention of the other, whereas for Levinas, the intervention of the other is the necessary condition in terms of making an ethical subjectivity. Furthermore, while Foucault asserts the importance of managing one’s excessive desire and pleasure in one’s ethical formation, Levinas emphasizes the importance of the subversive nature of one’s pain and suffering in one’s formation. Finally, while Foucault views the ethical language as an “ethical vehicle” of virtuous cultivation; Levinas regards the ethical language as an “ethical urge” of the other. At the end of this chapter, I shall show how Foucault and Levinas’ ethical embodied subject can complement for each other so as to show us a comprehensive notion of the ethical embodied subject.

In chapter five, the conclusion, while this dissertation shows that both Foucault and Levinas’ ethical embodied subject can modify some of the social constructivists’ problematic approach to the body and body politics, I argue that it is Levinas’ ethics of the body, not Foucault’s ethics of body, that can offer contemporary body politics a more solid ethical ground, especially for an ethical formation of the subversive subject. In particular, this chapter will show the importance of the Levinasian approach to the bodily pain and suffering in terms of one’s ethical formation.
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Lok Wing Kai, Peter
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Chapter One. Introduction: Foucault, Levinas and the Rebirth of the Ethical

Embodied Subject after Modernity

A. Postmodern Critique of Dualism and Its Repression of the Body

Edith Wyschogrod states that one of the important strands of postmodernism1 “can be identified as the concern with corporeality.”2 For the postmodernists, the body has long been repressed or distorted by Cartesian rationalism and dualism. They argue that Cartesian subjectivity, which privileges the mind over the body, has negated the value of the human body. For Descartes, the “I” is the soul, which is distinct from the body, and would not cease to exist even if the body did not exist. Thus, consciousness, which separates from the world and the body, becomes “an island unto itself.”3 We regard such

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1 Steven Best and Douglas Kellner define postmodernism/postmodern theory as follows: “The discourses of the postmodern also appear in the field of theory and focus on the critique of modern theory and arguments for a postmodern rupture in theory. Modern theory—ranging from the philosophical projects of Descartes, through the Enlightenment, to the social theory of Comte, Marx, Weber and others—is criticized for its search for a foundation of knowledge, for its universalizing and totalizing claims, for its hubris to supply apodictic truth, and for its allegedly fallacious rationalism.” Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), p. 4.

2 Edith Wyschogrod, “Towards a Postmodern Ethics: Corporeality and Alterity,” in Edith Wyschogrod and Gerald P. McKenny (eds.), The Ethical (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 54. Wyschogrod also argues that the twentieth century’s understanding of corporeality occurs in three waves: “The first wave consists in identifying the problem. The subject of rationalist and empiricist philosophies in their classical forms is mind or consciousness. If the subject is not merely a consciousness but always already in a world, a new account of the subject’s transactions with that world in which spatial orientation and motility figure is required. If these primordial world-relations bypass consciousness, the character of the subject must be reconfigured. The second wave focuses on the body as intrinsic to subjectness, on what bodies must be if the subject is a body-subject and what the subject must be if it is corporeal. The third wave (only now coming to the fore) asks whether and how the corporeality of the subject bears upon ethics and, if it does, how are we to understand both ethics and corporeality in that context. What happens to practical reason, to moral deliberation, when the subject is constructed corporeally? If there is something like a body-subject, how does it force a reconsideration of notions of freedom and responsibility?” Ibid., p. 55. According to this classification, this dissertation, which deals with the question of embodied ethics, belongs to the third wave.

3 Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism (Bloomington and Indianapolis:
a Cartesian worldview as a dualist model. Dualism refers to the view that reality or human being consists of two disparate parts (mind and body) that cannot be reconciled.

Dualism is already formed in the pre-Socratic separation between appearance vs. reality and Plato’s soul vs. body. These two substances, like Plato’s soul and body, are two distinct, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances, each of which has its own self-contained sphere.4

The major problem of dualism is not only its separation of two substances but also its hierarchy that privileges one (like Plato’s idea or Descartes’ mind) over the other (like Plato or Descartes’ body). For instance, Plato privileges the eternal Idea and regards the body as the prison of the soul. He not only negates the value of the body but also negates the value of the gendered body. Prudence Allen says that, in Plato’s philosophy “a woman’s or a man’s nature flows directly from the character of her or his soul, which is an immaterial and therefore non-sexual entity. Since the soul or mind is neither male nor female, when Plato considers the question of how woman and man are opposite, he concludes that when they are considered from the perspective of their real nature, they are the same. More specially, it is the sexless soul and not the material body that

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4 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 6.
determines the identity of the woman and man."5 Plato believes that since the soul is the
ture nature of a person, bodily existence is merely an appearance of the true reality; men
and women also have no significant difference.

The postmodern feminist Elizabeth Grosz says that dualism is a form of
reductionism that “reduces either the mind to the body or the body to the mind.”6 It does
not presume that there is an interaction between mind and body; rather it always
privileges one side at the expense of the other. For instance, rationalism and idealism are
a dualist reductionism since they always explain the body and matter in terms of mind,
ideas, or reason. Therefore, Grosz says, “the major problem facing dualism and all those
positions aimed at overcoming dualism has been to explain the interactions of these two
apparently incompossible substances, given that, within experience and everyday life,
there seems to be a manifest connection between the two in willful behavior and
responsive psychical reactions.”7 In other words, dualism not only refers to a split or
separation between mind and body, but also refers to a reductive relation between mind
and body. Body and mind in a dualist model are no longer in a dynamic interactive
relation; rather one side is always subordinated to another side. More specifically,

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5 Prudence Allen, The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC--AD 1250 (Montreal: Eden
6 Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies, p. 7.
7 Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies, p. 6.
Cartesian dualism not only denies the value of the body, but also denies the value of
gendered bodies and gender.

The postmodern approach to the body aims at re-affirming the value of the body and
criticizing any repressive discourses that negate the body. In particular, the
postmodernists are against an essentialist understanding of the body that reduces the body
to a controlled or manipulated object. The postmodernists claim that the body is a
socially and culturally constructed product, which does not have any pre-given or
transcendent essence. Any essentialist understanding of the body is a repression of the
body. The social constructivist approach to the body has become an important paradigm
in contemporary gender studies and queer studies.

Many influential contemporary feminists or queer theorists, such as Simon de
Beauvoir, Monique Wittig, Judith Butler or Elizabeth Grosz, adopt a social constructivist
approach to the social and cultural formation of the body. Serene Jones defines the
constructivist approach to the body as follows: “Feminist constructivism can be defined
as a theory that focuses on the social, cultural, and linguistic sources of our views of
women and women’s nature. Feminist theorists do not always use the term
‘constructivism’ precisely, however. In most cases, use of the term makes the general
point that supposed eternal verities of women’s nature are historically and culturally
variant and, consequently, that gender is 'formed' rather than 'given.' In particular, social constructivists argue that giving the gendered body an "essence" or "ontological nature" is to impose power towards those who have an alternative bodily and sexual identity distinct from the dominant sexual culture. Social constructivists think that an essentialist understanding of the body is always associated with various kinds of repressive heterosexual and patriarchal norms that repress or manipulate those who cannot conform to the norms.

Social constructivists argue that there is no pre-discursive/pre-cultural body. Rather, all kinds of bodies are culturally and discursively constructed. Grosz states: "The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistance throw-back to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, the cultural, product." Ontological understandings of body, which give the body a pre-given nature, are unethical: first, they mask the fact that the body is simply a socially constructed body; second, they negate the singularity of body through generalizing the meaning of the body. Thus, Grosz says, "it [a feminist philosophy of the body] must refuse singular models, models which are based on one

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type of the body as the norm by which all others are judged. There is no one mode that is capable of representing the ‘human’ in all its richness and variability.”

For some social constructivists such as Butler, the aim of body politics is to “deconstruct” different ontological understandings of the body, particularly coherent and fixed understandings of the body, then reconstruct the subversive meaning of the body so as to subvert our traditional, heterosexual and patriarchal understandings of the body. As Ladelle McWhorter says, such body politics aims at deconstructing any discourses that fix one’s sexual identity: “Counterattack against sexual normalization in general and sexual identities in particular, based on normalized bodies as a rallying point, depends upon affirming development without affirming docility, depends upon affirming the free, open playfulness of human possibility even within regimes of sexuality without getting stuck in or succumbing to any one sexual discourse or formation.”

Therefore, gender for Butler is performative, and gendered identities are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs. The body is simply a style, a variable boundary, a

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10 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 22.
12 Sara Salih explains Butler’s gender performativity as follows: “Butler has collapsed the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender… which means that there is no ‘natural body’ that pre-exists its cultural inscription. This seems to point towards the conclusion that gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’. “ Thus, for Butler, genders are neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of stable identity. See Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 62.
signifying practice, but not a being. Gender and the body have no ontological status.

Even the interiority of the self is an effect of public discourse.

For social constructivists, stylization of one's bodily identity, which includes subverting all social laws in an endless bodily mutation, subversion or deconstruction, is the only way to defend one's bodily freedom. In Gender Trouble, for example, Butler privileges an alternative non-stereotyped bodily identity over a traditional stereotyped bodily identity. Butler's subversive bodily politics proposes that we need to keep constructing or styling an alternative non-stereotyped gender identity so as to subvert various kinds of stereotyped gender identities constructed by dominant social laws. In Lesbian Body, Wittig also demonstrates how non-stereotyped bodily identity can offer us a new imagination towards our sexual identity. As Svi Shapiro says, the contemporary body movement is deeply informed by "a particularist thought" that affirms the value of the concrete and the autonomy of the body. The social constructivists' political strategy is an aesthetic subversion of repressive gender culture through symbolically styling one's

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14 In Gender Trouble, Butler privileges a "future style of body." While Butler criticizes Kristeva's pre-discursive libidinal multiplicity, she asserts a future mode of sexual drive. She argues, since all bodies are culturally constructed, the culturally liberated body will be liberated neither to its natural past nor to its original pleasures but to an open future of cultural possibilities. In other words, she expects that the future mutation of a culturally constructed body is more "desirable" than a traditionally constructed body. In this way Butler privileges a "future style of body." This, I think, is the hidden normative ground of her theory of the body. See Gender Trouble, p. 93.

Such particular/alternative/subversive/queer gender identity can make one become a stylish and free subject who need not conform to the dominant social and cultural norms or laws.

But is stylization of one's bodily identity an unconditional act? One's subversive bodily identity is not necessarily ethical. For instance, if a “right wing racist” makes a “kill the immigrants” tattoo on his or her body, we would not regard it as a “subversive bodily act” because it is basically an unethical bodily subversion that simply promotes the “hatred of others.” Thus we should think of how stylization of one's bodily identity can yield a subversive and ethical bodily act. But most social constructivists fail to take into account an ethics of bodily subversion.

Furthermore, for some social constructivists, the meaning of the body is only cultural. They regard stylization of one’s bodily meaning as a construction of the cultural meaning of the body. To put it bluntly, they reduce the body to cultural text. While I agree that changing the cultural/textual meaning of one’s body can subvert some repressive boundaries, I do not agree that only the cultural meaning of the body can subvert repressive boundaries. Rather I believe that the body per se, which includes one's bodily gesture, suffering face and bodily sensation, can also generate a subversive or even ethical meaning.
Of course, some social constructivists would not agree that they fail to take into account the subversive element of one’s bodily sensation. In fact, in today’s body politics, most social constructivists do treat the bodily pleasure as a “force” or “strategy” to subvert the social norms so as to achieve one’s freedom. In other words, it is unfair to argue that social constructivists simply ignore the power of the natural body and reduce the body to cultural text. While I agree that social constructivists do recognize the subversive meaning pleasure as a bodily sensation, they do not pay enough attention to the ethical meaning pain, which is crucial for making a responsible subject in contemporary body politics.

My concern is this: if social constructivists treat “liberation of pleasure” as the ultimate aim of body politics, this might cultivate a pleasure-driven egoist subject who is indifferent to the suffering of others. I do not reject or repress the value of bodily enjoyment; what I reject is a body politics that is solely driven by pleasure-seeking. In other word, social constructivists ought to ask how one’s bodily sensation can cultivate a responsible subject, who not only takes care of himself or herself but also takes care of others who suffer. Besides pleasure, can another bodily sensation subvert repressive boundaries and limit one’s egoist mentality?

In response to the ethical problems generated from contemporary body politics,
McWhorter asks: “How can we remain within the movements of development in such a way that they remain movements of change, difference, becoming, and self-overcoming—ever open to newness, unconstrained by some pre-determined developmental trajectory?” We need to ask: Is bodily transformation an unconditional transformation? Can stylization of the body be ethical? Is stylization of self simply a symbolic deconstruction and reconstruction of self? Can stylization of body fully actualize the meaning of the body? How can the subversive subject become a responsible and ethical subject? Beyond one’s subverting repressive boundaries or identity through changing the cultural meaning of the body, can the body per se generate a meaning that is both subversive and ethical? In addition to pleasure, can other bodily sensations become a subversive and ethical force to subvert repressive boundaries? Can the pleasure-driven subject mourn for the other’s suffering?

B. The Idea of an Ethical Embodied Subject after Postmodern Critique of Cartesian Dualism

In response to the problems generated from the Cartesian dualist and the social constructivist approaches, we need to develop a comprehensive notion of an ethical embodied subject. By “ethical embodied subject,” I mean the subject is not only an...
embodied subject, who can sense or comprehend the world with his or her bodily
sensation, but also an ethical embodied subject, who can build up an inter-subjective
relationship with the other. In particular, such an ethical subject can take responsibility
for the other and respond to the other’s suffering.

With respect to the notion of embodied subject, one thinks of Husserl and
Merleau-Ponty’s innovative phenomenological approach to the body. Both these two
phenomenologists not only assert the importance of embodiment in understanding our
life-world but also re-construct an embodied subject after rejecting a disembodied notion
of human being. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty take embodiment seriously. Yet their
approaches to the body mainly assert the epistemological dimension of the body, not the
ethical dimension.

What matters for Husserl and Merleau-Ponty is how the body can serve as a
condition of perceiving our life-world, not how the body can serve as an essential
condition of being ethical. Although this does not mean that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s
phenomenological approach to the body lacks ethical implications, their emphasis on the
body is mainly driven by an epistemological concern. Husserl uses his notion of
kinaestheses (the experiential expression of our ability to move our bodies), discussed in
the *Fifth Meditation*, to describe how the subject’s bodily movement constitutes the
subject’s perception towards the object surrounding him or her. Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body attempts to show that our perception of the world cannot be separated from our bodily existence: “my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception, even though it is never itself that is perceived or itself that perceives.”

While both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty offer us a sophisticated reflection on the epistemological dimension of embodiment, their approach does not emphasize the ethical dimension of body. Their approach is less relevant to the ethical and normative questions raised in the dissertation.

After Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s innovative approach to one’s embodiment, other contemporary philosophers have reflected on the ethical dimension of the embodied subject, which was underdeveloped by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. Inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s embodied subject, the political philosopher Charles Taylor develops a notion of the ethical embodied self that deeply inspires contemporary political debate on liberalism and communitarianism. Because Cartesian dualism and political liberalism

generate a disengaging self-centered subject that separates the subject from his or her moral sources, in *Sources of the Self* Taylor re-articulates an ethical embodied subject whose ethical identity is informed by one's dialogical relation with one's ethical tradition and living community. Taylor's ethical embodied self, a dialogical self, not only helps one escape from one's self-centered world, but also gives one a "strong" ethical horizon to interpret one's life and cultivate one's spiritual depth: "I define who I am by defining where I speak from, in the family tree, in social space, in the geography of social statuses and functions, in my intimate relations to the ones I love, and also crucially in the space of moral and spiritual orientation within which my most important defining relations are lived out."19 Taylor believes that such an ethical embodied self can overcome the modern problem of individualism or narcissism that celebrates the interest of the self and ignores the interest of the community.

Inspired by Husserl and Levinas' notions of otherness and embodiment, Paul Ricoeur, an influential phenomenologist, also argues that otherness is an important condition for the making of one's ethical identity. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur argues that three bodily experiences make us become an ethical embodied subject: the experience of one's own body, one's bodily relation to the other's body, and the relation

of the embodied self to itself; that is, conscience. The other, for Ricoeur, is not separate from the subject, and the subject is not passive towards the other's ethical command. The subject and the other are in a symmetrical and reciprocal relationship. That is to say, the subject has a capacity to love the other and build up friendship with the other. As Annemie Halsema rightly says, “Ricoeur’s ‘oneself as another’ ultimately implies that the relationship to the other is not the relationship to the other outside, but that it is already prepared within the ontological structure of the self. The self already relates to itself as other, engaging in a relationship with another who is foreign as well as having others included in its conscience. Hegel's definition of love as ‘being oneself in another’ is here complemented with a self that relates to itself.”

Unlike Levinas, Ricoeur does not allow the other to “persecute” the subject so as to motivate the subject to respond to the other’s need. He argues that what makes one respond to the other’s need is self-esteem, not self-hatred: “Even recognizing this [the ethical primacy of the other than the self over the self], it is still necessary that the irruption of the other, breaking through the enclosure of the same, meet with the complicity of this movement of effacement by which the self makes itself available to

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others. For the effect of the ‘crisis’ of selfhood must not be the substitution of self-hatred for self-esteem.”

Ricoeur emphasizes a model of mutuality to understand an inter-subjective relationship.

Although Taylor and Ricoeur’s ethical approach to the ethical embodied subject can supplement Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s epistemological approach to the embodied subject, their approach still cannot solve the social constructivists’ problems. First, Taylor and Ricoeur’s notions of an ethical embodied subject fail to take into account the ethics of stylization of self. While both of them affirm the importance of one’s body in one’s ethical formation, they do not consider one’s bodily transformation as primary or foundational in one’s ethical formation. Thus, their notion of the body cannot offer us a strong ethical ground to think of the ethical implication of self-stylization that prioritizes the transformation of the body. Second, both Taylor and Ricoeur’s ethical embodied subject, who has a strong inter-subjective dimension, cannot overcome the egoist

22 Of course, this does not mean that Taylor and Ricoeur view the ethical embodied self as a “static self” that does not have a capacity of self-transformation. In fact, since both of them view “narrative,” “interpretation” and “dialogue” as the nature of self, their subject keeps changing its identity through interpreting the text, tradition and community that surround him or her. But, I have to emphasize that their subject’s ethical identity is primarily transformed by a change of horizon or narration, not primarily changed by one’s sensual contact with the other. Thus, their transformation of the ethical self is not “bodily” or “fleshly” enough. In Oneself as Another, Ricoeur obviously links up with Taylor’s thesis that one’s ethical identity is primarily formed by one’s interpretation: “Here, I link up with one of Charles Taylor’s major themes in his Philosophical Papers: man, he says, is a self-interpreting animal. By the same token, our concept of the self is greatly enriched by this relation between interpretation of the text of action and self-interpretation. On the ethical plane, self-interpretation becomes self-esteem. In return, self-esteem follows the fate of interpretation. Like the latter, it provides controversy, dispute, rivalry—in short, the conflict of interpretation—in the exercise of practical judgment.” Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, pp. 179-80.
tendency of the pleasure-seeking subject. While I appreciate that both Taylor and Ricoeur can affirm the importance of the “other” in one’s ethical formation, they fail to give a “priority role” to the other, which I think, is crucial in limiting one’s egoism.23 Since both Taylor and Ricoeur privilege a symmetrical relationship between subject and other, over an asymmetrical relationship between subject and other, their notion of an ethical subject cannot warrant that the subject should take responsibility for the other. That is to say, the other is not “transcendent” or “high” enough for the subject to live for him or her.

C. Foucault and Levinas on the Ethical Embodied Subject

Thus far I have outlined the theoretical problems of contemporary social constructivists’ approach to the body. These problems include an unconditional stylization of the self and an unconditional celebration of bodily pleasure. I have also discussed why Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Taylor and Ricoeur’s embodied subject fails to respond to the social constructivists’ problems.

This dissertation will focus on Foucault and Levinas’ notion of an ethical embodied subject because this notion can respond to the social constructivists’ problems. Foucault’s theory of body deeply inspires contemporary body politics. Foucault inspires the social

23 I agree with Ricoeur’s critique of Levinas that an unconditional affirmation of the priority of other and the passivity of subject eliminate the self’s capacity for making an ethical response to the other. Thus, in the chapter four of the dissertation, I shall discuss how Foucault’s care of self can leave “room” for the Levinasian subject to develop his or her ethical sense towards the other without giving up the principle of “priority of other.”
constructivists’ claim that one’s body is socially constructed by culture, and stylization of self is the only way to achieve a freedom of life. Most social constructivists share Foucault’s claim that one can achieve one’s stylish bodily identity only if one transgresses or subverts one’s bodily boundary. Butler, for example, mentions that her “stylish body” is similar to Foucault’s “stylistics of existence.”24 Where Foucault differs from most of the social constructivists, however, is that he can further show a stylish embodied subject to be not simply a “stylish subject” but an “ethical stylish subject.”

Stylization of the body, for Foucault, is not an unconditional act; rather it aims at cultivating a unique and free ethical subject that not only takes care of oneself but also takes care of the other. Foucault’s ethical embodied subject can show us the importance of the ethical dimension of stylization of self. Of course, as I shall discuss later, Foucault’s approach to the embodied subject, which fails to give the other a “transcendent role” and treats the subject as a “pleasure-driven subject,” cannot solve the second problem: limiting one’s egoism in one’s bodily subversion.

Thus, in response to the second problem, I argue that Levinas’ ethical embodied subject can provide a solution to Foucault’s problem. For Levinas, the subject cannot become an ethical subject without an irresistible intervention by the other. The other is...

24Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, p. 139.
the only way to limit one’s egoism. Furthermore, Levinas argues that it is the sense of suffering, not the sense of pleasure, that makes one ethical. If we fail to give priority to the experience of suffering, we can never cultivate a truly critical and responsible subject who not only subverts any repressive culture but also mourns for the suffering other. For Levinas, one’s sense of responsibility towards the other can only be aroused and maintained through one’s empathetic bodily relationship with another suffering body; one’s pleasure-seeking egoist mentality can only be “overcome” by one’s bodily exposure towards the other’s pain. I shall argue that Levinas’ ethical embodied subject can transform Foucault and social constructivists’ subject into a truly ethical subject: a subject who can mourn for the other.

Of course, while Levinas’ ethical embodied subject can modify Foucault’s limitation, this does not mean that Levinas’ project can offer us a sufficiently comprehensive notion of ethical embodied subject after the critique of Cartesian dualism and social constructivism. Thus, this thesis will compare the strength and weakness of Foucault’s and Levinas’ ethical embodied subjectivity to see how they can complement each other so that a more comprehensive notion of ethical embodied subject is formulated.

In this dissertation, I shall discuss the later Foucault’s writings *History of Sexuality II* and *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and the later Levinas’ writing *Otherwise than Being*. 
which have given us a constructive and in-depth approach to the ethical embodied subject.

In chapters two and three, I shall first discuss Foucault and Levinas' ethical embodied subject and outline their basic characters:

1. Their ethical embodied subject is not a disengaged rational subject who detaches from the other/world and treats the other/world as an object of knowledge; rather their subject is an embodied being who either inhabits an inter-subjective social world or incarnates the other's life. More important, such an ethical embodied subject is not an egoist subject; rather he or she is concerned with the other's life either in an active way (Foucault) or in a passive way (Levinas).

2. Their approach views the body as a “vehicle” to perform or express one’s ethical existence. One’s ethical identity is realized or revealed through one’s body or bodily life. To certain extent, ethics for the embodied subject is a “performative ethics.”

3. Ethical consciousness and subjectivity are not separable from the body. One becomes ethical not by obeying a social norm or rule but by transforming one’s body through exercises (Foucault) or by exposing one’s body to/for the other (Levinas). Bodily transformation is a necessary condition of being ethical. Foucault and Levinas do not unconditionally or indiscriminately accept all bodily transformations or identity-formations, however. There is a qualitative or ethical difference among various
kinds of bodily transformations and identity-formations. Their theory of the body is an ethics of the body.

4. Their view of the ethical embodied subject not only asserts the ethical dimension of one's bodily sensation (Foucault's pleasure or Levinas' pain) but also treats it as a way to subvert all repressive social (Foucault) and psychological (Levinas) boundaries.

In chapter four, I shall examine the differences and commonalities of Foucault and Levinas' ethical embodied subject so as to see whether they can complement each other's strength and weakness. Although many studies focus on either Foucault's or Levinas' ethics, studying their ethical thought from a comparative perspective, especially their later thought, is still rare. Thus far we can find only four attempts to compare Foucault and Levinas' ethics: Noreen O'Connor's essay on "The Personal is Political: Discursive Practice of the Face-to-Face," Barry Smart's essay on "Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility," Johanna Oksala's small section in Foucault on Freedom and Benda Hofmeyr's doctoral thesis on Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas. These four works mainly compare Foucault and Levinas' ethics of the other without paying much attention to their notions of the ethical embodied subject. That is to say, they all fail to understand and compare Foucault and Levinas' ethics from their notion of body or embodiment. Chapter four will fill this "gap" through comparing their notions of ethical
embodied subjectivity.

In chapter five, the conclusion, I shall discuss how Foucault and Levinas' ethical embodied subject can offer us a more solid ethical ground for contemporary body politics. I shall argue that Foucault’s stylization of self can show the social constructivists the ethical dimension of stylization of self. Then, I shall show how Levinas' mourning subject can transform Foucault and social constructivists' pleasure-driven subject into a truly ethical subject.
Chapter Two. Foucault on the Body and Ethics

A. The Late Foucault: Towards an Ethical Understanding of the Embodied Subject

It is widely argued that a stunning transformation occurred during the last years in Foucault’s life from 1976-1984, in which he moved from his famous anti-humanist and poststructuralist “death of the subject,” asserting the “rebirth of the subject” revealed in his lectures given at the College de France. In one of the lectures, titled *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault discusses the spirituality of the subject, the transformation of the subject, and the technique of the self. He articulates a “strong” vision of the subject and ethics. Being inspired by ancient Greek ethics, he is concerned with how different practices of the embodied self make possible an ethical subject.

Could we say that there is a “paradigm shift” in Foucault’s project? Is the early “the death of subject” compatible with the late “rebirth of the subject” in Foucault’s project? If the early Foucault is hostile to the humanist subject, then is there a betrayal in his later return to the notion of the subject? The “paradigm shift” in Foucault’s project has aroused much discussion among Foucault scholars. Paras argues that there definitely is a paradigm shift in Foucault’s project: “[h]is [Foucault’s] migration away from the concept of discipline--even before the ink on American copies of *Discipline and Punish* was fully
dry—and toward an understanding of individualization that was rooted less in practices of domination than in auto-initiated practices of limiting and restraint was, to say the least, a paradigm shift."¹ Paras claims that the change is mainly due to Foucault’s engagement with the *nouveaux philosophes* and the Iranian Revolution. Harrer argues, by contrast, that we should not view it as a paradigm shift; rather there is a conceptual continuity between the “early” and “late” Foucault: “…fabrication and self-constitution of subjects are but two sides of the same coin, and … hence, there is no ontological difference between the subject in the ‘early’ and the ‘late’ Foucault.”²

In other words, while there are ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions of subjectivity articulated in the early and late Foucault respectively, this does not mean they are incompatible. I hope this chapter can show, through reading Foucault’s *Hermeneutics of the Subject* and *History of Sexuality II*, that Foucault does not forsake the “subject” per se. In fact, the “subject” he forsakes in his early stage is only an epistemological disembodied subject, not an ethical embodied subject. While *Hermeneutics of the Subject* rejects a rational Cartesian subject, Foucault introduces an ethical aesthetic subject, which rests on ancient

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Greek ethical traditions. Thus, Foucault’s early claim of the death of the subject only rejects a rational form of the subject, not the “subject” itself. In fact, the later stage of a return of the subject would be impossible without his previous genealogical critique of the subject. In other words, we can read Foucault’s early “destructive critique of the subject” as a theoretical preparation for his later ethical project; or his later “constructive approach to the subject” as a “redemptive response” to his earlier “destructive approach.” In fact, we can read Foucault’s earlier and later approach to the subject as a dialectical circulation.

This chapter will look at the late Foucault’s notions of body, ethics and ethical subjectivity in order to gain a more complete understanding of what I will coin the “ethical embodied subject.” For Foucault, the problem of rationalism is its dualist understanding of mind and body in which the body is an inferior object to be dominated by the mind or consciousness. For Foucault, the body is not the object of control; rather it is the very condition of subjectivity. It is not the soul or mind that controls the body, but the body that conditions the mind or soul: “the soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body.”

In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault argues that power works on one’s body to

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produce the soul, subjectivity and consciousness. The soul is not pre-given; rather it is the result of different kinds of bodily disciplines. As Margaret A. McLaren rightly says, “Having rejected metaphysical dualism, Foucault cannot posit a mind, soul, psyche, or subjectivity that is somehow prior to or apart from the body.... Power through its effect on the body produces an interiority (the soul), and in turn, it is in part through this interiority that power is exercised on the body.”

Foucault takes the question of body seriously and examines different mechanisms that discipline one’s body because he believes that one’s living mode, including one’s self-identity or one’s style of living cannot be separate from one’s body. In other words, for Foucault, subject is a contextual embodied subject, not a universal and transcendent disembodied subject, since the subject’s body conditions him or her.

Foucault’s skeptical attitude towards different cultural formations of the body has made many commentators think that his project supports an anti-essentialist approach to the body, one that denies the essence of the body and treats the body as simply culturally and linguistically constructed. For Butler, one of the anti-essentialist feminists, a body is not even a being, but only a linguistic “style.” She seems to deny the materiality and concreteness of the body. To put it bluntly, the body, for her, is no longer a lived and

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4 Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), p. 84.
concrete body. Since Foucault's genealogical critique of the body has inspired Butler's anti-essentialist position, he is commonly identified as an anti-essentialist or constructivist. It is also argued that Foucault, who allegedly treats the subject as only a discursively and culturally constructed "product," denies any high ethical ideals for human beings. In particular, he skeptically treats all human relationships as domination. Charles Taylor, for example, charges that Foucault's neo-Nietzschean approach to the value of the human being treats human relationships as domination and reduces ethical and spiritual values to a repressive value: "... in the work of the late Michel Foucault... high ethical and spiritual ideals are often interwoven with exclusions and relations of domination." 5

However, Foucault's skeptical approach to different cultural formations or disciplines of body does not mean that he totally rejects all bodily disciplines or formations. In the later stage of Foucault, we find that he approaches bodily formation in a more "constructive" and "positive" way. Inspired by a Greek notion of care of the self, Foucault positively affirms an exercise of the body that can make possible one's ethical identity. For the Greeks, philosophy, which includes both an ethical and existential value, is about a way of life and a way of being. The Greeks believe that only if one can care

and manage one’s bodily life can one live out one’s philosophical life or an ethical form of life. One needs to learn how to transform one’s life through training one’s sensibility or bodily condition in order to actualize a specific style of ethical living. Here Foucault does not simply treat the discipline of body as a violent repression; rather he treats it as a condition of cultivating an ethical way of life.

Furthermore, the late Foucault emphasizes the importance of the art of governmentality, an ethical administration of individual, which can make a contribution to the security of society. As Tina Besley and Michael A. Peters say: “For Foucault ‘governmentality’ means the complex of calculations, programs, policies, strategies, reflections and tactics that shape the conduct of individuals, ‘the conduct of conduct’ for acting upon the actions of others in order to achieve certain ends. Those ends are ‘not just to control, subdue, discipline, normalize, or reform them, but also to make them more intelligent, wise, happy, virtuous, healthy, productive, docile, enterprising, fulfilled, self-esteeming, empowered, or whatever.’”⁶ The art of governmentality, which can cultivate an ethical political life through disciplining one’s bodily life, enables Foucault to view the bodily disciplines in a more “positive” way.

For Foucault, governing oneself and others properly and ethically is related to how

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one uses power in a non-coercive way. According to Greek ethics, one does not abuse the power towards the other if one can control one's anger properly. If one can control one's emotional life properly, one can also limit one's power while governing the other. Here, the late Foucault presumes that the subject is no longer a passive agent who is simply determined by power; rather the subject is an active agent who can use power freely and productively. In particular, Foucault views the use of power as a necessary means to constitute one's ethical identity. As Besley and Peters say: "His [Foucault's] later work emphasises self-determination or agency as self-regulation where individuals are continually in the process of constituting themselves as ethical subjects (ethical self-constitution). He emphasised that individuals are continually in the process of constituting themselves as ethical subjects through both technologies of the self and ethical self-constitution, and a notion of power that is not simply based upon repression, coercion, or determination."\(^7\)

In other words, Foucault's genealogical critique of the violent repression of the body is only part of his ethical concern about the body, not the whole of his ethical project. Only if we recognize the importance of the care of the embodied self, as inspired by Greek ethics, can we fully recognize the value of Foucault's project. Thus, from a close

reading of the later Foucault’s project that affirms an embodied ethics, we may find that merely labeling Foucault as an anti-moral social constructivist is not fair. Such interpretations rest on an incomplete interpretation of Foucault’s genealogical critique, not taking into account the late Foucault’s works on embodied ethics. Being inspired by ancient Greek care of the self, the late Foucault neither rejects ethical values nor treats all human relationships as domination. Instead, he takes seriously an ancient Greek ethics, which views the ethical life as a daily bodily exercise. He treats those bodily practices as an inspiration for contemporary people to reconstruct an embodied ethics in response to the ethical crisis brought by modernity and Christianity. The late Foucault does not view all human relationship as a repressive domination; rather he argues that care of the self can lead to care of the other.

This chapter will argue that what the late Foucault rejects is a rational disembodied subject, not an ethical embodied subject. In the following sections, I shall first consider Foucault’s notion of Greek ethics, his critique of Christian morality, and his distinguishing ethics from morality. Then I shall look at how Foucault is inspired by Stoic, Epicurean, and Aristotelian ethics to formulate the ethical subject and the practice of an aesthetics of existence. While I agree that Foucault does have a harsh attack on Christian morality and its interpretation of the body and sexuality, I want to argue that his critique
of the Christian moral norm does not destroy ethics per se, but tries to subvert a
hierarchical repressive relation between ethics and the body deeply embedded in
Christian culture, in which the body is treated as "the docile body" to be disciplined by
the religious institution. Furthermore, being inspired by a Greek balanced teaching on
ethical norms and the body, the late Foucault aims at figuring out how a Greek ethics of
the care of the self, including properly managing one's body or desire, can be worked out
in a non-manipulative way, so as to avoid the Christian way of violently controlling one's
sexuality and body.

B. Foucault on Morality and Ethics

One of the main concerns in the late Foucault is the crisis of morality. Because we are
experiencing a crisis of morality brought by modernity, we have to find the root of the
crisis. Accordingly, the late Foucault goes back to ancient Greek ethical traditions,
especially the ethical traditions of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the
Epicureans, where he wants to find an inspiration in response to the crisis of morality.
Foucault discovers that one source of today's moral crisis is Christian moral legalism,
which constructs an un-free moral subject through subjecting one's embodied life to strict
moral rules.

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault problematizes the legalist and repressive nature of
the Christian morality. Although it may seem that Foucault is concerned with the practice of ancient sexuality, his concern is morality. Foucault once remarked to Arnold Davidson: “what made sex so interesting to him [Foucault] had little to do with sex itself. His focus on the history of ancient sex, its interest for him, was part of his interest in the history of ancient ethics.” And when Foucault was once asked in an interview about his concern in *History of Sexuality*, he confessed: “I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex...sex is boring.” In fact, if we carefully study the three volumes of *History of Sexuality*, we may see that Foucault has characterized Western sex history as the story of our losing the subject’s freedom. He has shown how every body is subjected to a strict moral rule or code that derives from a personal God and that we are asked to decipher and then renounce ourselves and sacrifice our pleasure for the sake of salvation. But Foucault finds that this kind of legalistic morality is disappearing. Thus, we have to seek a new ethics: “[t]he idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of

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existence." The aesthetics of existence is basically a classical ethics deeply rooted in the ancient Greek ethical tradition, which differs from a strict and legalistic Christian morality.

According to Foucault, the ancient Greeks, through practicing care of the self as a way of being ethical, have made possible a flexible and non-legalistic notion of ethics distinct from the strict legalistic notion of Christian morality. In fact, Greek ethicists are not interested in designing a strict and passive rule-conforming practice for an ethical subject; rather they are concerned with a flexible and active bodily practice, through which one can build up a singular virtuous identity for oneself. More important, for the Greeks, ethics was not related to any social or legal institutional system. Thus, Greek ethical practices, with a free style, have inspired Foucault to think of an alternative way of being ethical under the crisis of modernity, which results from the failure to establish a new ethical ground for liberation that is based on neither religion nor science. Foucault rejects a passive making of an ethical subject that does not give the subject any freedom in responding to the moral boundary set by society.

Although it is tempting to conclude that Foucault tries to replace legalistic Christian

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ethics with ancient Greek ethics, that is obviously not the main intention of his late
ethical project. Foucault is very careful not to present ancient Greek ethics as a solution
to the contemporary moral crisis brought by the decline of legalistic Christian ethics.

Foucault says we cannot find the solution to the problem in the solution to another
problem raised at another moment by other people. As O'Leary says, “He [Foucault] is
very careful not to contrast a relatively free mode of sexual ethics—in Classical
antiquity—with a relatively repressive and intolerant sexual ethics in Christianity: the
point is not ‘they were free, we are not. So let’s regain what they had.’” Rather,
Foucault is interested in “problems” and not “solutions.” He wants to examine the shift
of emphasis from the ethical subject as an active and free ethical subject to a passive and
unfree ethical subject, from that of the ancient Greek to that of the Christian age. While
Foucault does not want to take ancient Greek ethics as an alternative ethics for today’s
moral crisis, he does nevertheless insist that Greek ethics or an aesthetics of existence can
serve as an “inspiration” for those who seek a new ethics for today’s critical situation. In
other words, Foucault’s re-activation of the Greek ethics is “not a repetition, but the
creation of something new.” In the following subsection, I will discuss Foucault’s

16 Timothy O’Leary, Foucault: The Art of Ethics, p. 84.
understanding of ethics, arguing that Foucault turns to ancient Greek ethics for inspiration in his search for an alternative to Christian legalism.

1. Morality as Coding

In *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, Foucault points out that morality comprises two elements, namely, codes of behavior and forms of subjectivation. These two elements are never entirely dissociated, though they may develop in relative independence from one another. The coding nature of morality aims at controlling one’s behavior by ensuring that one’s behavior would not violate a universal social norm. Foucault says that this version of morality always refers to “a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches and so forth. It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching... [W]ith these qualifications taken into account, we can call this prescriptive ensemble a ‘moral code.’”

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18 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.
important, the coding nature of morality turns morality into a kind of obedience to rules, but not a cultivation of an ethical form of life through bodily exercises.

Foucault has identified Christian morality as such a behavior-coding morality, which he thinks has repressed the subject's body and turned the body into a "docile body." That is to say, Christian morality does not make an active and free ethical subject, but a passive and unfree ethical subject. But how does the Christian culture exert its moral power on the subject? What kind of theology is used for the manipulation of human sexuality? What kind of subject is constructed by church culture?

In *The Use of Pleasure* and *Abnormal*, Foucault argues that Christian morality exerts its power on the subject through interpreting the body as the sinful body. From the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the body is the object of discipline, in which the body is manipulated through the church's mechanism of confession, penance and examination. Within this period, the body is regarded as a vehicle of sin due to the Christian dogma of sin, in which the theological discussion of sin shifts from an interrelational level to a more individual level. Originally, sin is about a brokenness of human relations or a violation of a legitimate human relationship. Adultery, for example, is sin because it violates a covenant relation in a marital relationship, which is treasured by Christianity. Later, however, sin of the flesh is emphasized, and gets associated with the human body:
"...we can say that the sins of the flesh are newly focused on the body. Sins are no longer distinguished and ordered in terms of illegitimate relationships but rather by the body itself. It is the body that determines the order of questions. In a word: we are witnessing the flesh being pinned to the body. Previously, the flesh, the sin of the flesh, was above all breaking the rule of union. Now the sin of the flesh dwells within the body itself."¹⁹

Since sin is determined in terms of the acts of the body, especially the sexual act, the body has become the focal point for the examination and confession of conscience carried out by the church.

Since sinful violation towards human beings is extended from an interpersonal level to a more personal level, the technique of the control of the sin carried out by the church is also adjusted to a more personal and micro level. That is to say, church power tends to be a more micro power. In Abnormal, Foucault shows how confession became extended and generalized as a domain of control in the sixteenth century’s in-depth Christianization. He says, “with the Council of Trent, the sacramental armature of penance is explicitly maintained, renewed, and then, within and around penance in the strict sense, an immense apparatus of discourse and examination, of analysis and control, spreads out... First of all, the domain of the confession is extended and confession tends to be

generalized. All, or almost all, of an individual’s life, thought, and action must pass through the filter of confession, if not, of course, as sin, at least as an element relevant for an examination or analysis now demanded by confession. Second, there is an even more pronounced intensification of the power of the confessor corresponding to this formidable extension of the domain of confession." Confession became a dominant mode of control, through an open dialogue between priest and person.

Interestingly, the examination and confession of the relational dimension of sexual sin gradually turned into a personal confession of the penitent concerning his or her personal bodily act. This means the area of the confession tended to be more personal, and especially involved one’s own bodily sensation. For example, masturbation was a sin because it aroused sexual fantasy. Thus the penitent confesses not only the "obscene content" in his or her masturbation, but also the sensual experience or sense of guilt aroused in his or her illegitimate sexual bodily act. As Foucault puts it:

"From the sixteenth century on, the fundamental change in the confession of the sin of lust is that the relational aspect of sexuality is no longer the important, primary, and fundamental element of penitential confession. It is no longer the relational aspect that is

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20 Michel Foucault, *Abnormal*, p. 177.
now at the very heart of questioning concerning the Sixth Commandment, but the movements, senses, pleasures, thoughts and desires of the penitent’s body itself, whose intensity and nature is experienced by the penitent himself. The old examination was essentially the inventory of permitted and forbidden relationships. The new examination is a meticulous passage through the body, a sort of anatomy of the pleasures of the flesh (la volupté). The body with its different parts and different sensations, and no longer, or much less, the laws of legitimate union, constitutes the organizing principle of the sins of lust. The body and its pleasures, rather than the required form for legitimate union, become, as it were, the code of the carnal.”

The confession of one’s bodily sensation changes the control of the body from the control of one’s own behavior to control of one’s own bodily sensation and pleasure. In other words, the Christian moral control of the body is not restricted to the control of the sexual behavior, but extended to the control of one’s own pleasure and sensuality. Therefore, according to Foucault, such Christian morality can only construct an un-free subject, because sensuality as a bodily expression or an expression of one’s personality becomes an object of church’s manipulation. It is also an implicit micro control because it exerts

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21 Michel Foucault, Abnormal, p. 186.
its power through a theological discourse or confessional discourse that turns power control into a “soft control.” For Foucault, this coding aspect of morality is destructive, because it respects only social norms and church authority, but fails to respect the freedom of the subject. Of course, Foucault’s rejection of the Christian morality does not mean he gives up any ethical reflection on the body; rather he discovers that a more flexible form of morality, one which rests on Greek ethics, can respect one’s bodily life and cultivate one’s ethical life in a non-coercive way.

2. Morality as Ethics

After criticizing the Christian legalistic interpretation of morality and its negative interpretation of body and sexuality as a sinful sexed body, Foucault argues that, in addition to a codification of one’s behavior, morality has another dimension, namely, the function of subjectivation. This aspect of morality does not concern what rule we have to obey, but what kind of ethical subject is created through interacting with different forms of moral code. In other words, it emphasizes the forms of relations with the self, the methods and techniques by which he or she makes himself or herself an object to be known, and the practice that enables him or her to transform his or her mode of being. Due to this relational dimension of moral practice, Foucault calls it ethics, so as to
Of course, one could ask, since rules, norms and moral traditions are still involved in such a subjectivation, what is the difference between morality and ethics? Foucault says, the difference between ethics and morality is that the former leaves a room and space for the subject to choose, obey or resist, and the latter fails to do so: “It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching... But ‘morality’ also refers to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them: the word thus designates the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values.” Ethics for Foucault is a more flexible form of morality that leaves room and freedom for one to decide when and how to accept the norm in an autonomous manner. Moral norms are merely points of reference for an ethical person, and being ethical is ultimately determined by what form of ethical subject one wants to be, not by any moral authorities.

In addition, the ethical form of morality presumes that one has different ways to distinguish it from morality.²²

²² Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 30.
²³ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.
conduct oneself morally:24 “[g]iven a code of actions, and with regard to a specific type of actions (which can be defined by their degree of conformity with or divergence from the code), there are different ways to ‘conduct oneself’ morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action.”25 Since ethics does not require the agent to accept the norm unreflectively, it may generate different kinds of ethical agents or subjects within a moral tradition because one is asked to digest and re-interpret the norm with reference to one’s concrete bodily life. I regard such free internalization of a moral norm in one’s own bodily life as an embodied ethics.

Foucault uses the example of fidelity to examine the flexible form of embodied ethics:

“One can relate the crucial aspects of the practice of fidelity to the strict observance of interdictions and obligation in the very acts one accomplishes. But one can also make the essence of fidelity consist in the mastery of desires, in the fervent combat one directs against them, in the strength with which one is able to resist temptations: what makes up the content of fidelity in this case is that vigilance and that struggle... Alternatively, one

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can have it consist in the intensity, continuity, and reciprocity of feelings that are experienced vis-à-vis the partner, and in the quality of the relationship that permanently binds the two spouses."²⁶

Foucault does not like the enforcing nature of interdiction even though it can make one practice fidelity. Rather he suggests that we should allow one to control one’s bodily desire in an autonomous way, not in an enforcing way. For instance, fidelity may rest on an affective and voluntary relationship between two subjects. Thus, for Foucault, ethics is not a legalistic disembodied ethics, because one’s moral decision is not enforced by punishments and interdictions that ignore one’s bodily situation. Rather it is an embodied ethics because it respects one’s particular bodily situation so that one can decide what to practice and what not to practice in a voluntary way. In other words, such embodied ethics prioritizes subject over rule. This does not mean that the traditional moral teachings are totally useless in the making of the ethical subject, for those moral teachings can serve as references for the subject to create his or her aesthetic living style, as we will discuss later.

The next sub-section will explore a series of questions with regards to the Greek

²⁶ Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp. 26-7.
notion of the ethical subjectivity. These questions include: What sort of ethical subject is formed by an embodied ethics? What is ethical style? How can ethics be a style? Does it have aesthetic value? Does Foucault try to use aesthetics to replace ethics?

C. Greek Ethics and Stylization of the Ethical Subject

According to Foucault, Greek ethics views morality as an ethical subjectivation. Foucault privileges Greek ethic over Christian ethics, because the former is a flexible and nonlegalistic form of ethics that privileges the bodily life of the moral subject, but the latter is a rigid and legalistic form of ethics that privileges rule over subject. That is to say, the former gives us freedom by leaving a space for creating one’s own ethical identity, but the latter constructs a repressive moral identity for us that represses the bodily life of the subject.

Foucault says that ancient Greek ethics refers morality to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them—the manner in which they comply with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction and the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values.27 That is to say, Greek ethics allows the subject to actively cultivate a desirable character for himself or herself. It is the subject’s decision, not the coercive rule, that ultimately

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27 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 25.
determines the subject’s ethical character. Greek ethics does not encourage subjects to build up their ethical characters through obeying rules. As Foucault says, Greek ethics can make the subject conduct himself or herself as an ethical subject through referring to the prescriptive elements that make up the code. In contrast, since Christian ethics coercively imposes its moral standard on each subject without leaving “space” for the subject to make decisions, it ultimately fails to help the subject become a stylish ethical subject. In other words, for Foucault, Greek ethics can respect the singularity of the subject’s embodied life, whereas Christian morality cannot affirm the singularity of each ethical subject’s life.28

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that both the Greeks and Christianity have a normative understanding of sexuality, but he prefers the Greek one to the Christian one, because the Greek sense of the norm of sexuality is for making an stylish subject, through a practice of self; whereas Christianity is driven by a sense of interdictions.29 Indeed, he wants to “analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows

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28 Foucault’s critique of the problematic nature of Christian ethics fails to recognize that not all Christian social teachings are intrinsically repressive. For instance, liberation theology in Latin America or neo-Calvinism in the Netherlands can generate a social ethics that respects human rights and freedom.
29 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 13.
them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. 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.”30

For Foucault, the ethical concern over sexual conduct should not be tied to the system of interdiction.31 What impresses Foucault about the Greek notion of ethics is that it treats moral action as a voluntary and intentional action by which ethical subjects not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their bodily life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. That is to say, handling appropriately and skillfully one’s bodily life, i.e., sexual life, is an art for Greeks. Being an ethical subject is also being an aesthetic subject; and ethical life is also identified as aesthetic life. Simply put, the Greeks combined ethics and aesthetics, without splitting them into separated realm. Foucault adds:

“...we could say that classical antiquity's moral reflection concerning the pleasures was not directed toward a codification of acts, nor toward a hermeneutics of the subject, but

30 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 5.
31 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 10.
toward a stylization of attitudes and an aesthetics of existence. A stylization, because the rarefaction of sexual activity presented itself as a sort of open-ended requirement… A moral value that was also an aesthetic value and a truth value since it was by aiming at the satisfaction of real needs, by respecting the true hierarchy of the human being, and by never forgetting where one stood in regard to truth, that one would be able to give one’s conduct the form that would assure one of a name meriting remembrance.”32

For Foucault as for the Greeks, the stylization of oneself, including managing appropriately one’s desire and pleasure (the criteria will be discussed later), is a combination of ethical and aesthetic value whose function is to give an aesthetic form to the subject. That is to say, moral reflection on pleasure and desire is not necessarily a repression of one’s sensational life; rather it could be a stylization of the subject’s attitude. Of course, Foucault is not the first one to use “style” to characterize ancient Greek ethics. In fact, Foucault admits that his interpretation of Greek ethics as style is mainly inspired by Peter Brown, whom he thinks is the first scholar to use the notion of style to characterize ancient Greek ethics. Foucault says, “[t]he use that I make of ‘style,’ I have

32 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, pp. 92-3.
borrowed in large part from Peter Brown.\textsuperscript{33} In \textit{The Making of Late Antiquity}, Brown suggests that there was a change of style from pagan religiosity in Late Antique Egypt to a Christian religiosity. Brown says, “The ‘style’ of religious life of the late second and third centuries... was that the frontier between the divine and the human had lain tantalizingly open.” Interestingly, for Brown, the rapid change is caused by the monks because they “fought against their own past, and they did so by creating a new style of religious life, that was the antithesis of that against which they had rebelled.”\textsuperscript{34} From Brown’s interpretation, Foucault finds that creating a new ethical life or order could be a rebellious living style that actualizes one’s individuality. This inspires Foucault to perceive the Greek ethical life as a stylish aesthetic life.

But does this mean that Greek ethics is only an aesthetics that privileges the stylization of life? In fact, some Foucault scholars, like O’Leary, tend to emphasize Foucault’s notion of style as only an aesthetic style influenced by Nietzsche, or they associate Foucault’s ethics with dandyism influenced by Oscar Wilde, in which the ethical aspect of style, especially its virtuous element receives less emphasis. For instance, O’Leary highlights the aesthetic aspect of the late Foucault’s ethics, but downplays or

\textsuperscript{33} Eric Paras, \textit{Foucault 2.0}, p. 134.
even ignores its virtuous content. O’Leary says that his approach to Foucault “will explore the extent to which Foucault’s interpretation of ancient ethics may be said to be coloured by his commitment to a new form of dandyism,”35 and he thinks “the more ‘aestheticist’ interpretation—which is principally, although not exclusively, presented in interviews—arises from Foucault’s wish to produce a shock-effect which will jolt his listeners (and ultimately readers) out of their habitual acceptance of a particular form of morality. Foucault may not be exactly be a ‘rebel in the name of beauty,’ but he is a rebel who uses beauty’s name to advance the same cause which animated both Nietzsche and Wilde—the end of a particular form of modern, Western morality.”36 According to O’Leary, Foucault’s appropriation of ancient Greek ethics aims at using a free form of aesthetics against a strict form of morality.

I would argue, however, that O’Leary’s interpretation is one-sided. It underestimates the virtuous element in the notion of style that Foucault stresses in his lectures at the College of France (discussed later in this chapter). O’Leary cannot fairly read Foucault’s ethics because he does not pay enough attention to lectures such as *Hermeneutics of the Subject* where Foucault shows how his later reflection on the ethical subject is deeply influenced by ancient Greek ethics.

While I agree that Foucault as Nietzsche’s follower does appreciate that aesthetics could serve as a radical style against morality, we should not neglect the fact that Foucault is inspired by the virtuous element embedded in Greek ethics as well. Although Foucault regards Greek ethics as an aesthetics of existence, we should not view Greek ethics as only an aesthetic form of life. In contrast, we should be aware that Foucault sees the Greeks’ aesthetics of existence as a virtuous existence. That is to say, various kinds of virtuous contents fill the aesthetic form such that the aesthetic form of life could not be fully justified without a virtuous content. For the Greek ethicists, as for Foucault, what the ethical subject expresses in his or her life is not just an artistic form; rather it is a virtuous form of life.

Here, the notion of aesthetics connotes more a specific living style than a specific artistic content. According to Davidson, ancient Greek ethics always associates style with an ethical style, and this has inspired Foucault’s reflection on stylization of the self: “Each philosophical school--Stoic, Epicurean, Platonist, and so on--represented a style of life that had a corresponding fundamental inner attitude... [T]o indicate what part of oneself one judges, how one relates oneself to moral obligations, what one does to transform oneself into an ethical subject, and what mode of being one aims to realize is to indicate how one lives, is to characterize one’s style of life... And when Foucault says the
problem of an ethics is the problem of ‘a form [I would say ‘style’ here] to be given to one’s conduct and one’s life,’ he does in fact link the notion of ethics and style of life in a conceptually intimate way.” In other words, perceiving Foucault’s ethics as only an aesthetic and Foucault’s style as only an aesthetic style cannot do justice to Foucault’s intention. In fact, by style, Foucault normally refers to a particular identity-formation that is against any indoctrination of social norms. It is this rebellious attitude against indoctrination of social norms that makes possible a stylish life. That is to say, style is a very personal and fundamental attitude about life.

Furthermore, Foucault’s ethics, like Greek virtue ethics, emphasizes the importance of self-transformation or bodily exercise, which is the basic teaching of Greek virtue ethics. Indeed, for Foucault, as for Greek ethicists, virtuous life is the outcome of bodily exercise. That is to say, one needs regularly to practice one’s bodily life in order to build up one’s ethical character. Thus, Foucault says:

“The Greeks, in fact, considered this freedom (liberty) as a problem and the freedom of the individual as an ethical problem. But ethical in the sense that Greeks could understand. Ethos was the deportment and the way to behave. It was the subject’s mode

of being and a certain manner of acting visible to others. One's ethos was seen by his
dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events, etc. For
them, that is the concrete expression of liberty. That is the way they ‘problematized’ their
freedom. The man who has a good ethos, who can be admitted and held up as an example,
he is a person who practices freedom in a certain manner. ”

For Foucault, ethics is ethos. It is a mode of being and a way to behave, not a rule of life.
The ethical subject is a man or woman who can live out a virtuous life in his or her public
life. But, the subject cannot cultivate a virtuous life by himself or herself; rather the
subject needs the guidance of the mentor to help him/her practice different kinds of
ethical exercises offered by different philosophical schools, such as the Stoic or
Epicurean, so as to cultivate an ethical mode of being (the relationship between mentor
and student in Foucault’s ethics will be discussed later). Furthermore, ethos is not a
private ethics; rather it is a public ethics. As Pinto says, for Foucault, the ethos, though a
personal matter, was obviously not a private one, because it was “publicly observable”
and “visibly permeated by social norms and political codes.” In other words, Foucault

38 James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.), The Final Foucault (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press,
never thinks of a private ethics; rather his notion of ethos is related to a public ethics or a
civil virtue.

Being ethical is not the result of religious conversion, then, but the outcome of a
labor of self or a bodily practice. For the Stoics, an ethical subject needs practice to
testify that he or she has a virtue of insistence. Seneca says good men have to be
submitted by God to the test in order to harden them, to make them courageous and
strong and thus to prepare them.40 God prepares men for himself; he prepares the men he
loves for himself because they are good men; and he prepares them for himself through a
series of tests that make up life.

Seneca's concept of test includes at least two ideas. First, life with its system of tests
and hardships is an education. The culture of the self is essentially the substitute for an
inadequate education. In particular, the culture of the self is crucial for those young
people who have devoted themselves to the political career: they have to learn to take
care of their bodily lives so as to properly fulfill the ethical demand of their career, such
as to take care of the other. Thus, as Foucault says, the generalization of this idea of the
care of self in Greek culture was not just an obligation; rather it was a life-long education:
one had to take care of the self throughout one's life. The whole life must be treated as

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40 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982* (New
the individual's education, which consists in educating oneself in facing life's misfortunes.

Care of the self is a life-long education, like a spiral between education and form of life.41

Foucault stresses that for the Greeks, viewing life as test and training is connected to a fundamental but enigmatic discriminating function, which can distinguish between good and bad people. According to Seneca, life as a test is reserved for good people, so that they are distinguished from others, "while those wicked not only do not pass the test, or do not recognize a test in life, but their life is even not organized as a test."42 Good people, who can show their strength and insistence in the test, are also those who can take a leadership role in the political realm. As Foucault quotes Epictetus:

"There are men who are naturally so virtuous, who have already amply demonstrated their strength, that God, rather than letting them live amongst other men, with the advantages and drawbacks of ordinary life, sends them as scouts into the greatest dangers and difficulties. It is these scouts of hardship, misfortune, and suffering who, on the one hand, will set especially tough and difficult tests for themselves but, as good scouts, will then return to their city in order to tell their fellow citizens that, after all, they should not worry themselves so much about these dangers they so greatly fear, since they themselves

41 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 439.
42 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 440.
have experienced them...as scouts...who are able to teach others that one can triumph
over these tests and evils, and that there is a path for this that they can teach them.\textsuperscript{43}

Obviously, the ethical subject is the one who can go through the test of life in which one
has to experience hardship, misfortune and suffering. More important, the virtuous person
not only cares for himself or herself, but also cares for the others. Indeed, when the
virtuous person passes the test, he/she will go back to his or her city to comfort,
strongen and encourage his or her fellows to face the challenges brought by evil. In
other words, the practice of the care of the self is not a self-centered practice for the
Greeks; rather it is a preparation for the care of others. To a certain extent, care of the self
is the necessary condition for care of others (the ethical relation between care of self and
care of other will be discussed later).

Foucault argues that to care for the self is not to cultivate the culture of narcissism,
as some critics believe. Rather it is about how to properly practice one’s behavior so that
one can become an ethical subject. Foucault is fully aware of the distortion of “care of the
self” in Western culture, and he tries to re-articulate its ethical nature in order to counter
egoism, which is always associated with care of self. He says,

\textsuperscript{43} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 441.
“Caring for self was, at a certain moment, gladly denounced as being a kind of self-love, a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or to the necessary sacrifice of the self. All that happened during the Christian era, but I would not say that it is exclusively due to Christianity. The situation is much more complex because, in Christianity, achieving salvation is also a caring for self. But in Christianity, salvation is obtained by renunciation of self. There is a paradox of care for self in Christianity, but that is another question... I think that both with the Greeks and the Romans—and especially with the Greeks—in order to behave properly, in order to practice freedom properly, it was necessary to care for self, both in order to know one’s self—and there is the familiar gnothi seauton—and to improve one’s self, to surpass one’s self, to master the appetites that risk engulfing you.” 44

In other words, care of the self is not about self-love or narcissism; rather it is an actualization or cultivation of a virtue of self-control. It is about the making of a moderate subject. For the Greeks, as for Foucault, if we fail to practice a virtue of self-control, we may fail to become an ethical subject. In fact, self-control is important for being an

44 James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds.), The Final Foucault, pp. 4-5.
ethical subject, because to be ethical one first needs to properly manage one’s power and desire. If one fails to learn to control one’s own desire and power, then one would easily impose one’s power and exert violence towards the other. Thus the practice of care of self, which includes learning to control one’s power and desire, is important for the formation of the ethical subject because it can help to cultivate a virtue of moderation for the subject to govern the other (the ethics of governing and care of self will be discussed later). And this also supports my argument: the lived body with desire and force is a necessary condition for Foucault’s ethics, without which care of the self and the other is impossible.

Of course, it is tempting to argue that the later Foucault’s ethics is a virtue ethics since Foucault shares some similar natures with Greek virtue ethics. For example, both

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45 Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* states clearly that moral virtue is the result of daily habits and practices. For Socrates, as for Aristotle, virtue cannot be treated as abstract knowledge or turned into a set of disembodied rules for one to follow. Rather, a virtuous subject is formed only through different kinds of bodily practices. Being the successor of Socrates’ teaching of the practices of virtue, Aristotle says, moral virtue “is formed by habit, ethos, and its name, ethike, is therefore derived, by a slight variation, from ethos. This shows, too, that none of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit…. Thus, the virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to completion and fulfillment…. (T)he virtues, on the other hand, we acquire by first having put them into action, and the same is also true of the arts. For the things which we have to learn before we can do them we learn by doing: men becomes builders by building houses, and harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, we become just by the practice of just actions, self-controlled by exercising self-control, and courageous by performing acts of courage.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 33-4.

In brief, for Aristotle, we are not born with virtue, but nature can offer us the basic ability and tendency to become a virtuous subject. Thus, we need to practice virtue so as to acquire it. Stan Van Hooft gives us a good example to illustrate the relation between exercise or practice and virtue in Aristotle’s understanding: “We acquire, for example, the virtue of courage by doing courageous things. We should avoid being either foolhardy or cowardly. If we act in either of these ways, we shall acquire the habit of acting in that way and we shall not acquire the virtue of courage, whereas if we face up to danger bravely on a number of occasions, we shall gradually become courageous.” Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), p. 57. Being a virtuous subject first needs a self-transformation
view one’s ethical formation as the result of the practice; both privilege “what one is” over “what one does” in terms of being ethical. Since ethics, for Foucault, is not about law-obedience or rule-setting, but about the formation of the character of the subject, one would argue that Foucault’s ethics is a virtue ethics. Similarly Neil Lev argues that the later Foucault shares most of the basic motifs with contemporary virtue ethicists, like John McDowell. He says, both Foucault and McDowell “seek to replace what they see as a misplaced stress on codes with an ethics centred around the self. Moreover, they find this ethics of the self in the same source: the ethical thought of the ancients.”

Although both Foucault and virtue ethicists affirm the importance of exercise as a way to cultivate one’s virtuous life, however, it is still hard to argue that Foucault is a virtue ethicist. The main difference between Foucault and ancient Greek virtue ethicists, especially Aristotelian virtue ethics, is that Foucault does not believe that human beings have a pre-existing nature, but the Greek virtue ethicists believe that human beings have a pre-existing nature, but the Greek virtue ethicists believe that human beings have a

through different techniques and practices to craft our life and internalize the habit in our life; otherwise a subject is hardly a truly ethical subject. This does not mean that one needs to deny or repress one’s bodily feelings or emotions so as to become a virtuous subject; rather, for Aristotle, one needs to know how to handle or manage one’s feeling of fear, so as to cultivate a courageous life.

46 As Stan Van Hooft says, the basic motif of virtue ethics “will consider what sort of person the agent should be and what sort of life they should lead…. it will not answer this question primarily by consulting principles, norms or policies that apply to such situations in general. Rather it will seek to answer it by considering the agent’s own character along with other morally salient features of the situation. Virtuous agents will seek to express who they are and to develop themselves as who they are in what they do.” That is to say, it is not the rules that determine what we should do, but the kind of virtuous person we want to be determines what we should do. See Stan van Hooft, Understanding Virtue Ethics, p. 11.

pre-existing moral nature that one needs to uncover through cultivation. As was mentioned before, Foucault does not believe in the pre-given nature of one’s interiority; rather one’s interior self, one’s psyche, moral nature or consciousness, is conditioned by one’s bodily life. In other words, because Foucault denies any pre-given human virtuous natures that one ought to realize, his ethics cannot be regarded as a virtue ethics, even though his ethics takes seriously the cultivation of one’s character.

In sum, for Foucault, the merit of Greek ethics is that it can allow one to actively cultivate a desirable character for oneself so as to become a free and stylish ethical subject. More important, stylization of self, for the Greeks, does not simply celebrate an aesthetic style of life; rather it cultivates a virtuous living style. In particular, stylization of self emphasizes a virtue of self-control. The Greeks believed that if one failed to control one’s bodily life, one would easily impose one’s power and desire towards the other. In other words, stylization of self, for the Greeks as for Foucault, is not an unconditional stylization, but an ethical stylization. The following sub-section will further discuss Foucault’s understanding of the relation between ethics and the body, so that we may find a more comprehensive picture of the embodied ethics revealed in the later Foucault’s thought.

48 I thank Dr. Wouter Goris for his comments regarding the difference between Foucault’s ethics and Greek virtue ethics.
1. Ethics of Pleasure

For Greek ethics, virtue or moral excellence is concerned with pleasure. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says “it is pleasure that makes us do base actions…. For that reason, as Plato says, men must be brought up from childhood to feel pleasure and pain at the proper things; for this is correct education.” Aristotle believes that pleasure is related to the noble and the beneficial action. Moreover, pleasure is an index to our character. If one revels in every pleasure and fails to control one’s pleasure, then one becomes self-indulgent, and this is not an index of a virtuous person. For Aristotle, a virtuous act or the nature of moral qualities should not be destroyed by excess: “excess as well as deficiency of physical exercise destroys our strength, and similarly, too much and too little food and drink destroys our health; the proportionate amount, however, produces, increases, and preserves it. The same applies to self-control, courage, and the other virtues…a man who revels in every pleasure and abstains from none becomes self-indulgent, while he who avoids every pleasure like a boor becomes what might be called insensitive.” Like Aristotle, ancient Greek ethics in general is concerned with the control of one’s pleasure or desire: a virtuous person has to learn how to deal with the excess and to control one’s pleasure or desire. For Foucault, the Greek way of managing one’s desire and pleasure

50 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 36.
has formulated an important ethical tradition. He regards different practices, concerns and teachings of controlling one’s desire as an ethics of pleasure and desire. Since there is an intimate association between the use of sexual desire and pleasure and the formation of the ethical subject, the management or care of one’s bodily desire and sexual life is an important condition for making up an ethical subject.

If Christianity is also about care of the body or management of one’s desire, however, is there any difference between the Greek way of caring and the Christian way of caring? What is the aim of care of one’s bodily/sexual life for Greeks? Foucault argues there is a huge difference between the Greek way of care of the bodily/sexual life and the Christian way. They have different notions of the body and sexuality, and that makes the Greek and Christian moral traditions generate different sexual subjects. In particular, the former has a more positive view of sexual desire and pleasure than the latter.

In *Use of Pleasure*, Foucault says the problem of the Christian treatment of the body and sexuality is that it always takes the body as the sinful flesh so that we need to develop various doctrines and techniques to control and examine our body. The problem of the sinful flesh is that it is always associated with an excessive force of pleasure that has its principle in the Fall and in a weakness that reveals the sinful nature of human being.\(^{51}\)

\(^{51}\) Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.
The Christian way of care for one’s bodily/sexual life occurs through a practice of suspicion toward one’s own bodily life. Foucault says, “…. one of the characteristic traits of the Christian experience of the ‘flesh’, and later of ‘sexuality’, [is] that the subject is expected to exercise suspicion often, to be able to recognize from afar the manifestation of a stealthy, resourceful, and dreadful power.” In other words, because Christian culture identifies the body as a kind of mystical sinful power, Christians always treat the body as the object of control.

By contrast, the Greek way of care of one’s bodily/sexual life does not rest on any negative notions of body. Greek ethicists do not perceive the body as the sinful body, so that the body is turned into the docile body. The Greeks wish to manage one’s sexual life because of the natural force of the body, not the sinful force of the body. As Foucault says, the classical Greek treats the sexual force as a natural force that flourishes in the natural and human world. It is not sinful in nature: “[i]n general, sexual activity was perceived as natural (natural and indispensable) since it was through this activity that living creatures were able to reproduce, the species as a whole was able to escape extinction, and cities, families, names, and religions were able to endure far longer than individuals,

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52 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 41.
who were destined to pass away."\textsuperscript{53} Plato says sexual desire is the most natural and necessary desire; and Aristotle also says sexual desire is necessary for the body and life in general.\textsuperscript{54} In brief, the Greeks perceive the body as a natural sexual body that does not have a sinful nature.

Yet Aristotle does regard bodily pleasure as an object of moral concern, since pleasure-control belongs to the cultivation of virtue. In \textit{Use of Pleasure}, Foucault points out that the ethics of pleasure for Greeks aims at "a delimitation that would enable one to determine the proper degree and extent to which it [the sexual activity] could be practiced."\textsuperscript{55} But why do the Greeks have to treat the use of pleasure as a moral issue by delimiting the practice of sexual activity if sexual desire is natural, not sinful? Foucault argues that sexuality needs to be regulated because Greeks believe that the sexual desire is potentially excessive by nature. For ancient Greeks, "nature had invested human beings with this necessary and redoubtable force, which was always on the point of overshooting the objective that was set for it.... If it was necessary, as Plato said, to bridle it with the three strongest restraints: fear, law, and true reason; if it was necessary, as Aristotle thought, for desire to obey reason the way a child obeyed his tutor....the reason was not

\textsuperscript{53} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{54} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{55} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 48.
that sexual activity was a vice, nor that it might deviate from a canonical model; it was
because sexual activity was associated with a force, an *energeia*, that was itself liable to
be excessive. In brief, since the Greeks believed that sexual desire *per se* is always an
excessive force or energy that requires the subject to handle it appropriately, the care of
the sexual body serves as a main ethical concern for Greeks.

For Foucault, then, Greek sexual ethics differs from Christian sexual ethics because
the former emphasizes how to confront the sexual force, and how to regulate its economy
in a suitable way; but the latter emphasizes how to deny the excessive force of pleasure in
order to discipline the sinful nature of the human beings. More important, the Greek
way of care of one’s desire incorporates “self-discipline” into one’s life through practice
and habit, not by coercion. Thus, the Greeks treat the care of one’s desire not only as
ethics, but also as art because management of one’s desire needs technique and skill. It
demands one to have wisdom and skill to enjoy and use one’s desire, so one has to think
of the conditions under which one may have sex or when one has to control one’s desire
in order not to be dominated by the excess of desire.

Thus, Foucault argues, ethics of desire is an art of existence. For the Greeks,
regulating or managing one’s own sexual force or bodily force is like playing music that

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56 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.
57 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 50.
demands the sense of harmony and different kinds of training. Greek ethicists do not set rules to control the sexual behavior of the subjects; rather they help the subjects skillfully handle a technique to organize their bodily/sexual life, so they can learn how to balance different bodily sensations and expressions, such as pleasure, desire and sexual acts in different periods of time. Foucault says, “what seems in fact to have formed the object of moral reflection for the Greeks in matters of sexual conduct was not exactly the act itself (considered in different modalities), or desire (viewed from the standpoint of its origin or its aim), or even pleasure (evaluated according to the different objects or practices that can cause it); it is more the dynamic that joined all three in a circular fashion (the desire that leads to the act, the act that is linked to pleasure, and the pleasure that occasions desire). The ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported ‘by the pleasures and desires’? ”

The dynamic of the bodily force could be regarded as the Greek ontology of body that links together acts, pleasures and desires. This dynamic relationship constitutes the texture of the ethical experience of bodily pleasure.

If one’s desire needs to be controlled in order for one to become a virtuous subject, then what should the subjects learn when they practice the ethics of desire? First,
Foucault points out that Greek ethics of desire aims at setting the condition of the use of pleasure, not the rule of pleasure: “the goal of moral reflection on the *aphrodisia* was much less to establish a systematic code that would determine the canonical form of sexual acts, trace out the boundary of the prohibitions, and assign practices to one side or the other of a dividing line, than to work out the conditions and modalities of a ‘use’; that is, to define a style for what the Greeks called *chrēsis aphrodisiōn*, the use of pleasures…

It was not a question of what was permitted or forbidden among the desires that one felt or the acts that one committed, but of prudence, reflection, and calculation in the way one distributed and controlled his acts.”60 In other words, Greek’s ethics of desire is about creating the conditions for an appropriate way of pleasure—seeking to set up some basis of considerations for one to enjoy sexual pleasure. These conditions include the want factor, the temporal and circumstantial factor and the status factor.61

For the Greeks, as for Foucault, the practice of the ethics of desire will finally flourish in a particular style for the subject. As was mentioned before, ethics for the Greeks is about the formation of ethical subjects, but not about the construction of universal rules. The former can respect the embodiment of one’s life, or cultivate the excellence of one’s life, whereas the latter only generates a lifeless and bloodless

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60 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 53-4.
61 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 53.
legalistic moral life. Although it is the ethical content, not the aesthetic content, that makes the ethical subject possible, such an ethical subject is also an aesthetic subject because the subject is free to create a specific virtuous style for himself or herself with the aid of a mentor, not by indoctrination in any universal moral principles. According to the Greek ethical tradition, the making of the ethical self is an artistic stylization of the self, like an artist using his or her creativity to craft his or her artwork.

According to Foucault, the Greeks highlight three factors in the use of pleasure or control of pleasure. The first is the want factor, which is related to the strategy of need. The Greeks believed that we could only enjoy the pleasure of eating or drinking when we really felt hungry or thirsty. If we eat or drink excessively, we cannot enjoy the real pleasure of eating and drinking; or if an unnatural factor stimulates our desire to eat, it is difficult for us to have the pleasure of eating. Xenophon said that Socrates “ate just sufficient food to make eating a pleasure, and he was so ready for his food that he found appetite the best sauce; and any kind of drink he found pleasant, because he drank only when he was thirsty.”

Foucault says this strategy ultimately could benefit the soul. He quotes Xenophon presenting the following Socratic lesson: “people should ‘limit themselves to such indulgence as the soul would reject unless the need of the body were

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62 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 57.
pressing, and such as would do no harm when the need was there.""\textsuperscript{63}

For the Greeks, if one wants to enjoy sex, one's use of sexual pleasure should follow the above teachings. That is to say, we should have sex only if we need it naturally or we should fulfill our sexual pleasure of a natural kind. Foucault says, "But if pleasure must be sustained through desire, this does not mean that, conversely, desires must be increased by recourse to pleasures that were not of a natural kind. It is fatigue, says Prodicus, and not continuous idleness, that ought to make one feel like sleeping; and if it was proper to satisfy sexual desires when they appeared, it was not good to create desires that went beyond needs."\textsuperscript{64} In brief, the first condition of the appropriate use of pleasure is to identify sexual desire as a natural kind of desire, not as excessive sexual force; otherwise one can never enjoy a real sexual life. For the Greeks, to fulfill excessive sexual desire can never let one enjoy the pleasure of sex, for excessive desire violates the natural circulation of desire.

A second factor is the strategy of timeliness. This, too, is an appropriate way to regulate sexual desire. According to Foucault, the \textit{kairos} "was one of the most important objectives, and one of the most delicate, in the art of making use of the pleasures."\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{63} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{64} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{65} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Use of Pleasure}, p. 57.
Plato's *Laws* taught that "fortunate was the one (whether an individual or a state) who knew what needed to be done in this sphere, 'at the right time and in the right moment'; whoever, on the contrary acted 'without knowledge' [anepistémonos] and 'at the wrong time' [ektos tôn kairôn] would 'live a life that is just the opposite.'\(^6\) For the Greeks, handling one's practical skills, such as navigation or governing, is not only a matter of knowledge but also a matter of the "right time." Time discernment is a virtue of prudence that makes one capable of practicing the 'politics of timeliness' in the different domains. Foucault says that "morality was also an art of the 'right time'"\(^7\) in the use of pleasure.

But what is the "right time" for the sexual act? For the Greeks, the "right time" is decided according to several scales. For instance, they commonly believed that it is not good to begin the practice of pleasures too young; they also believed that it could be harmful if one extends it to an old age. That is to say, sexual intercourse has its season in life. Some even correlated sexual activity with climatic variation, between cold and hot, humidity and dryness.\(^8\) Furthermore, the choice of moment also depended on other activities. As Xenophon says, Cyrus was an example of moderation, not because that he denied pleasures, but because he knew how to distribute them properly, in not allowing

\(^6\) Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 57.
\(^7\) Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 58.
\(^8\) Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 58.
them to divert him from his occupation.  

The final consideration is status. Foucault says that the Greeks always related the art of making use of pleasure to the user's personal status. For instance, the Symposium suggests that "every sensible person knows very well that love relations with a boy are not 'absolutely either honorable or shameful but for the most part vary according to the persons concerned.'" For the Greeks, the appropriateness of sexual relation, such as a same sex relationship with a boy, is determined not by any universal rules, but by the status of the sexual subject. According to Foucault, "...in the classical ethics, with the exception of a few percepts that applied to everyone, standards of sexual morality were always tailored to one's way of life, which was itself determined by the status one had inherited and the purposes one had chosen." Thus, whether or not a sexual relation or activity is appropriate depends on what social status you hold in the society. For instance, the Greeks would think that if you are a leader, then it is inappropriate to have so many sex partners, as this can suggest that you do not have a virtue of endurance. As Xenophon says, "a ruler's superiority over ordinary men should be shown not by

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69 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 59.
70 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 59.
71 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 59.
72 Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 60.
73 Of course, the Greeks' status factor is problematic because it presumes that not everybody can enjoy sex, and that one's social status determines one's right of having sex. While Greek sexual ethics privileges the individual style over the universal rule so as to safeguard the subject's aesthetic style, it generates a sexual injustice that denies the universal sexual right.
For the Greeks, as for Foucault, the more authority one has, and the more one seeks to make one's life successful, the more necessary it was to freely and deliberately adopt a rigorous standard of sexual life.

Since regulating appropriately one's sexual desire needs to consider three factors in ancient Greek ethics, *enkrateia* or moderation becomes an important practice. *Enkrateia* is about self-control and about rule over pleasures and desires, in which one has to struggle to maintain control. If one wants to become a virtuous person, one has to become moderate, which is the character of a virtuous person. In other words, *enkrateia* is not only a practice but also a virtue. Foucault says, "Xenophon speaks of moderation—which, together with piety, wisdom, courage, and justice, was among the five virtues he usually recognized." Plato defines moderation as *enkrateia:* "moderation is a certain orderliness and mastery over certain pleasures and appetites." Foucault further clarifies that *enkrateia* is characterized by an active form of self-mastery that enables one to resist, struggle and achieve domination in the area of desire and pleasure. *Enkrateia* is a form of effort and control that makes one become an ethical person.

Being moderate is an important virtue for the Greeks because it can show that one

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74 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 61.  
75 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 60.  
76 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 65.  
77 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 64.  
78 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 64.
really wants to control one's life and be the master of one's life. But it is never an easy task. Foucault says that for the Greeks, "one could behave ethically only by adopting a combative attitude towards the pleasures." The Athenian of the *Laws* states: "if it is true that the man who is blessed with courage will attain 'only half his potential' without 'experience and training' in actual combat, it stands to reason that he will not be able to become moderate (sōphrōn) 'if he has not fought triumphantly against the many pleasures and desires [*pollais hēdonais kai epithumiais diamemachēmenos*] using the help of speech, deed, and art [*logos, ergon, technē*] in games and in serious pursuits." In other words, being an ethical subject requires hardship and discipline because it is about a battle within one's embodied life. Thus, becoming ethical has to start from one's bodily practice, without which one cannot truly manage oneself. For the Greeks, although practicing the virtue of moderation is a harsh task, it is worth doing because it is the only way for one to become a truly active and free ethical subject.

Moreover, if one fails to become moderate, one finds it hard to build up one's own aesthetic life, because the making of one's aesthetic and ethical life is about how one "individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special brilliance

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79 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 66.
80 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 65-6.
by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested."\(^8\) All these practices need a virtue of moderation to make them possible.

As was mentioned before, the later Foucault's ethics is an embodied ethics that links body, bodily practice and ethical cultivation in an intimate relation. Such an embodied ethics has at least two implications. First, unlike the legalistic Christian sexual ethics that Foucault critiques, an embodied ethics does not treat the body as a guilty or sinful body. For the Greeks, to manage one's desire and pleasure is ultimately for the sake of the subject and the other, not for the benefit of any establishments or authorities, such as the church's order. In the domain of pleasures, virtue is not a state of integrity but a relationship of self-mastery, in which the subject has to learn "to rule the desires and the pleasures," "exercise power over them," or "govern them." Foucault says that "to form oneself as a virtuous and moderate subject in the use he makes of pleasures, the individual has to construct a relationship with the self that is of the 'domination-submission,' 'command-obedience,' 'mastery-docility' type (and not, as will be the case in Christian spirituality, a relationship of the 'elucidation-renunciation,' 'decipherment-purification' type). This is what could be called the 'heautocratic' structure

\(^8\) Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 62.
of the subject in the ethical practice of the pleasures." For Foucault, the embodied virtue ethics aims at cultivating different techniques of the self so that the subject is capable of handling and governing his or her desire, pleasure and force. Otherwise the subject would fail to live out an art of existence. Unlike Christian spirituality, Greek spirituality does not deny the value of pleasure and desire. Rather what the subject needs to learn is how to use his or her pleasure and desire in a proper way.

Second, embodied ethics takes self-transformation as an essential part of ethical formation. According to Foucault, the problem of Christian morality is that it does not foster any autonomous transformation of the subject’s body. Of course, this does not mean that Christian morality does not transform the body. In fact, Christian morality has turned the body into “the docile body” through various kinds of religious discourses. But it fails to leave room for one to digest the church’s teachings, such that one cannot transform one’s own ethical subjectivity through an autonomous bodily practice and exercise. More important, in Christian morality, it is the threat of the church’s punishment, not a free deliberation initiated by the subject, that generates the subject’s bodily transformation. In contrast, Foucault’s embodied ethics privileges an autonomous bodily practice that leaves room for an autonomous self-transformation through exercising one’s

82 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 70.
own body. To exercise one’s body is an important way for one to master one’s soul. As Foucault says, for Xenophon and Socrates, “if one does not exercise one’s body, one cannot sustain the functions of the body (ta tou somatos erga); similarly, if one does not exercise the soul, one cannot sustain the functions of the soul, so that one will not be able to ‘do what one ought to do nor avoid what one ought not to do.’”

For Foucault, a disembodied Christian ethics fails to form a truly stylish and virtuous subject because it only requires the subject to unreflectively conform to the universal norm, without requiring the subject to have any autonomous bodily training or self-conversion. In particular, disembodied Christian ethics always makes use of punishment and surveillance as a way to monitor the subject’s behavior. This is not an authentic self-transformation, which must be the result of an autonomous bodily practice that is not motivated by any repressive mechanisms.

By contrast, an embodied ethics, which cultivates a stylish aesthetic identity, can respect the singularity of the subject. One can adjust the degree of transformation according to one’s social and political status without being restricted by any universal moral rules or norms. Foucault’s ethics is an embodied ethics: it respects the subject’s

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83 Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 72.
84 One could argue that Foucault’s embodied ethics promotes a moral emotivism because of its emphasis on the subject’s desire or emotion and the subject’s personal preference in one’s ethical decision. But I would argue that, while Foucault’s ethics emphasizes the decision of the subject, his ethics is hardly to be viewed as moral emotivism. First, although both moral emotivism and Foucault’s ethics are concerned
embodied life and affirms the value of the body and pleasure. More important, this embodied ethics suggests that one's ethical character is formed by one's autonomous bodily exercise, which transmits ethical value through a voluntary self-transformation, not by an involuntary indoctrination.

Of course, for the Greeks, cultivation of the virtuous subject not only relates to practicing the ethics of desire, but also pertains to searching for truth. To a certain extent, the making of an ethical subject is not possible without knowledge. For Foucault, as for the Greeks, searching for truth cannot be separate from self-transformation. This emphasis can replace the limitation of a Cartesian notion of truth that separates truth-searching from bodily transformation. The next sub-section will discuss Foucault's notion of truth as an embodied truth.

with the subject's own preference, the latter still requires the subject to take account of the teachings from some moral traditions and norms, while the former denies the necessity of such moral references and takes one's emotion as the only reference. Macintyre defines moral emotivism as "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character." See Alasdair Macintyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (London: Duckworth, 1992), pp. 11-12. Foucault's embodied ethics does not deny the importance of the wisdom of the ethical teachings embedded in one's own tradition. Although such moral teachings are not viewed as universal principles, and although one has to choose the desirable ethical role that one wants to stylize according to one's particular situation and the teaching of the mentor, Foucault does not say that the subject itself is the only criterion for a moral judgment. In particular, for ancient Greek ethics, the opinion of the ethical subject's mentor is also significant in terms of making an ethical subject.

Moreover, Foucault's ethics is not simply a personal ethics, as I have mentioned before; rather it is also a civic ethics. He says that moderation, "understood as an aspect of dominion over the self, was on an equal footing with justice, courage, or prudence; that is, it was a virtue that qualified a man to exercise his mastery over others. The most kingly man was king of himself." See Michel Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, p. 81. Thus, Foucault's embodied ethics has a sense of public responsibility. It can hardly be identified as moral emotivism.
2. Ethics of Truth

Some contemporary scholars of ancient Greek thought, such as Pierre Hadot, charge that Foucault’s interpretation of Greek ethics reduces Greek ethics into a dandy ethics that negates the importance of discovering the logos or wisdom of the world. Hadot says:

“M. Foucault is propounding a culture of the self which is too aesthetic. In other words, this may be a new form of Dandyism, late twentieth-century style. This, however, deserves a more attentive study than I am able to devote to it here. Personally, I believe firmly--albeit perhaps naively--that it is possible for modern man to live, not as a sage (sophos)--most of the ancients did not hold this to be possible--but as a practitioner of the ever-fragile exercise of wisdom. This can be attempted, starting out from the lived experience of the concrete, living, and perceiving subject, under the triple form defined, as we saw above, by Marcus Aurelius: 1. as an effort to practice objectivity of judgment; 2. as an effect to live according to justice, in the service of the human community; and 3. as an effort to become aware of our situation as a part of the universe. Such an exercise of wisdom will thus be an attempt to render oneself open to the universal.”

According to Hadot’s criticism, Foucault’s interpretation of Greek thought fails to appreciate the rational tradition of Greek thought that includes learning to make right judgment, practicing justice and viewing ourselves as part of the universe. In other words, the later Foucault’s ethics does not have a truth dimension or epistemological dimension. But Hadot’s critique of Foucault does not do justice to the later Foucault’s research on Greek virtue ethics. In fact, Hadot shares the mistake of so many of Foucault’s critics such as O’Leary or McNay by reading his ethics as merely an aesthetics (O’Leary) or a “pan-aesthetic dandyism” (McNay).\(^\text{86}\) He fails to take into account Foucault’s lectures at Collège de France, such as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where Foucault affirms the Greek way of nurturing a virtuous truth-speaking subject through self-transformation, not through rational deliberation or speculation, so as to make possible an embodied truth.

In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault argues that Greek ethics concerns not only how we can manage our desire in the making of an ethical subject but also how we think and speak as an ethical subject. For Foucault, Descartes’ rational approach to truth destroys the truth because of its split understanding of self and truth. He argues that the rational approach to truth is problematic because it views truth as a static propositional knowledge, and simply reduces the subject to an epistemological subject. In particular,

the Cartesian way of truth-searching privileges logical calculation over self-transformation. Whereas the disembodiment of the Cartesian approach to truth does not require one to transform one's body while searching for truth, the Greek way of truth-searching involves self-transformation that requires the subject to gain access to the truth with his or her bodily life.

Different notions of philosophy make the Greeks and Descartes have different approaches to truth. In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault regards the Cartesian approach to truth as philosophy and the Greeks' approach to truth as spirituality. For Foucault, philosophy "asks, not of course what is true and what is false, but what determines that there is and can be truth and falsehood and whether or not we can separate the true and false. We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth."\(^{87}\) Philosophy is about a methodology that enables the subject to figure out the condition of attaining truth. In contrast, the Greeks' spirituality is "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to

\(^{87}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.
the truth." In other words, spirituality is about the set of researches, practices, and experiences that include purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciation, conversing or looking, and modification of existence. These practices are not mainly designed to acquire knowledge, but for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.

Foucault privileges spirituality over philosophy: the former can generate an embodied truth that can deeply get in touch with life, whereas the latter simply generates a disembodied truth and life. This does not mean that Foucault is against philosophy. He simply believes that the Greeks' spirituality is a more comprehensive philosophy that can affirm the value of praxis and speculation in philosophizing. What he regrets is that philosophy, after ancient Greek philosophy, fails to see the connection between self-transformation and truth-seeking. In particular, for Foucault, the Cartesian approach to truth cannot benefit the subject. In fact, it even forgets the subject because it takes the subject as only an instrument or means of finding truth: "the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of

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88 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 15.
knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject."\(^{89}\)

Spirituality, for ancient Greeks, has three characteristics.\(^{90}\) First, it postulates that the approach to truth cannot simply rest on the static logical structure of the subject. Spirituality postulates that the subject as such does not have right of access to the truth. That is to say, truth is not given to the subject by a simple act of knowledge that could be simply found and justified by the fact that he or she is the subject and because he or she possesses this or that structure of subjectivity. Rather, the approach to truth demands that the one must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than oneself. Foucault says this is the simplest but most fundamental formula by which spirituality can be defined.

Second, for Foucault, as for the Greeks, approaches to truth need a conversion or a transformation of the subject that is related to a movement of eros (love) or a kind of work (askesis/ascesis).\(^{91}\) Foucault says eros and askesis are two major forms in Western spirituality for conceptualizing the modalities by which the subject must be transformed in order finally to become capable of truth.\(^{92}\) Foucault also shows that truth-searching

\(^{89}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 17.
\(^{90}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.
\(^{91}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.
\(^{92}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.
involves a correlation between ethics and practice. Since truth is generated from a
practice of the ethics of love, i.e., loving our neighbors, the truth privileged by the later
Foucault is no longer a theoretical truth, but an embodied truth, a truth of life. In fact,
such an embodied truth is a popular concept in ancient Greek philosophy, which views
philosophical thinking as an art of living, not an abstract speculation about life. As Hadot
says, for ancient Greek ethicists, such as the Stoics, "philosophy did not consist in
teaching an abstract theory--much less in the exegesis of texts--but rather in the art of
living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate life-style, which engages the whole of
existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that
of the self and of being. It is a progress that causes us to be more fully, and makes us
better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the
person who goes through it."93

Finally, for spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for
the act of knowledge; rather, as Foucault says, "the truth enlightens the subject; the truth
gives beatitude to the subject, the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul. In short,
in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfills the subject himself,
which fulfills or transfigures his very being... An act of knowledge could never give

93 Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, p. 83.
access to the truth unless it was prepared, accomplished, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject; not of the individual, but of the subject himself in his being as subject.” Here, truth is an ethical knowledge that can serve as beatitude to the subject to the extent that its ethical content can form a specific style for the subject through transfiguring the being of the subject.

Thus, the distinction between spirituality and philosophy is that the former can help one search for an embodied knowledge, so that it can ultimately transform the being of the subject, whereas the latter is only a disembodied knowledge that cannot transform the life of the subject, due to its rejection of the body in any truth-searching activities. Interestingly, for Foucault, truth cannot simply be identified as knowledge. Truth is more or less about the wisdom and virtue of life, which is prepared, accomplished, doubled, and completed by a certain transformation of the subject. As Pierre Hadot says, “…above all every school practices exercises designed to ensure spiritual progress toward the ideal state of wisdom, exercises of reason that will be, for the soul, analogous to the athlete’s training or to the application of a medical cure.” Truth-searching is identified as a “progress toward the ideal state of wisdom” that has to be achieved through bodily

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94 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 16.
exercise in which one can internalize a wisdom of truth or a virtuous life. Thus, practicing, not speculating on, the teaching about life is important because the former can help one transform a disembodied knowledge into an embodied truth. Moreover, what one acquires in the transformation is no longer a theoretical knowledge, but an ethical knowledge of life.

If truth, for the later Foucault, can cultivate virtue for the subject or give beatitude to the subject through bodily transformation, then we may further ask what kind of virtue or beatitude is given to the subject through the transformation? In fact, Greek ethical practices do not bring a self-renunciation at the end of *askēsis*. Rather they involve arriving at the formation of a full, perfect, complete, and self-sufficient relationship with oneself, namely, the happiness one takes in oneself.96 Such was the objective of *askēsis*. In other words, the objective of the practice of the self is not the individual’s submission to the law; rather its principle is to bind the individual to the truth.97 More important, as Foucault says, Greek practices not only bind the subject to the truth but also allow the subject to become the subject of enunciation of true discourse: becoming an ethical subject who can speak truthfully.

Yet not all practices can make a person become an ethical subject who dares to

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96 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 320.
97 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 332.
speak truth. Foucault says that Christian practices such as confession, which serve the function of self-renunciation, only make the subject the objectification of the self. In contrast, Greek practices can rejoin oneself as the end and object in the art of living, which “is not the objectification of the self in a true discourse, but the subjectivation of a true discourse in a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself.”98 For instance, the practices suggested by Seneca are a method of the subjectivation of true discourse with regard to “learning, the language of philosophers, reading, writing, and the notes you make, et cetera, that what is involved is making the things you know your own (‘facere suum’), making the discourse you hear, the discourse you recognize as being true or which the philosophical tradition has passed on to you as true, your own.”99 That is to say, the subject has to practice what I coin “the ethics of truth” through which the subject has to learn to judge and speak truly. Foucault says, “making the truth your own, becoming the subject of enunciation of true discourse: this I think, is the very core of this philosophical ascesis.”100

Foucault calls the ethics of speaking truth parrhēsia. Parrhēsia is a moral quality or a virtue that is about the act of telling all (frankness, open-heartedness, plain speaking,

98 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 333.
99 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 333.
100 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 333.
speaking openly, speaking freely). It is related to the honesty of the speaking subject. It is about what makes us speak, what makes us say what has to be said, what we want to say, what we think ought to be said because it is necessary, useful and true: “What is basically at stake in parrhēsia is what could be called, somewhat impressionistically, the frankness, freedom, and openness that leads one to say what one has to say, as one wishes to say it, when one wishes to say it, and in the form one thinks is necessary for saying it.... The telling all of parrhēsia was rendered by libertas: the freedom of the person speaking.” In other words, it is not about what one thinks is true, but what one knows is true.

Parrhēsia is a kind of truth that stems from a bodily knowledge, not from a theoretical knowledge, and through which one speaks what one feels and experiences in one’s life. Murray says that parrhēsia “is an immediacy to the truth that is expressed and felt through a bodily knowledge, by putting her body on the line, risking life and limb, risking her reputation.... Hence there can be said to be a ‘proof’ for the authenticity of the parrhesiastes. Foucault tells us it was his courage --not just a matter of the heart—le coeur--but the heart as a metonym for the life-force of the whole body.” Parrhēsia is

101 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 336.
102 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 372.
about an ethics of discourse that requires one’s integrity and commitment to one’s life-experience, because one cannot speak truly without honestly reflecting on one’s life.

If *parrhēsia* is an ethics of speaking truth or an ethics of discourse, then it must be related to the use of language. Foucault says that for ancient Greek ethics, true discourse is essential in a dialogue between master and disciple, especially to the master. The master is the one who teaches the disciple to become a virtuous subject and to practice a virtue of speaking. In contrast, the disciple normally has a listener’s role so as to practice an ethics of listening. Foucault says, “The question of what the disciple has to say, of what he must and can say, basically did not arise, at any rate not as a primordial, essential, and fundamental question. What was imposed on the disciple as duty and conduct--as moral duty and as technical conduct--was silence, a particular organized silence obeying a number of rules of posture, and the requirement of giving a number of signs of attention.”\(^{105}\) In other words, the virtue of *parrhēsia* is the speaker’s virtue that guides the speaker what to say and how to say it, according to some specific rules, technical procedures and ethical principles.\(^{106}\) It is a discourse for the sake of the other (the listening subject), not for the speaker (the speaking subject). Harrer rightly says, “The

\(^{105}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 372.

\(^{106}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 372.
exercise of *parrhēsia* involves practicing to give well-formed and comprehensive
lecturers that focus on the subject matter and not on rhetorical adornment. Also, the
lecturer is to set aside any personal intention of gaining advantage through what he might
say, but to focus on the needs of his students and to instruct them to their advantage.\(^{107}\)

The master's *parrhēsia* has two moral adversaries, which are flattery and rhetoric.\(^{108}\)

Foucault says that for the Greeks, if we want to speak freely, we have to be aware of the
immoral nature of flattery and rhetoric. Flattery and rhetoric are profoundly connected to
each other: the moral basis of rhetoric is always flattery, and the instrument of flattery is
the technique of rhetoric. Thus the one who practices the ethics of *parrhēsia* ought to be
aware of the moral problems brought by these techniques of rhetoric.

Furthermore, the problem of flattery is related to the problem of anger. For the
Greeks, anger is the uncontrolled and violent rage of the superior, such as the king or the
father, towards the inferior other: “[a]nger is, of course, the uncontrolled, violent rage of
someone towards someone else over whom the former, the angry person, is entitled to
exercise his power, is in a position to do so, and who is therefore in a position to abuse
his power.”\(^{109}\) Anger is unethical to the Greeks because it more or less shows that the one

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\(^{107}\) Sebastian Harrer, “The Theme of Subjectivity in Foucault’s Lecture Series *L’Hermeneutique du Sujet*,” p. 94.

\(^{108}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 373.

\(^{109}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 374.
who governs is incapable of governing others; anger is the sign of losing control towards oneself or the inferior other. Foucault says, "... the question of anger, of being carried away by anger or of the impossibility of controlling oneself--let's say more precisely: the impossibility of exercising one's power and sovereignty over oneself insofar as and when one exercises one's sovereignty or power over others--is situated precisely at the point of connection of self-control and command over others, of government of oneself and government of others."

In other words, anger makes the ruler abuse one's power and fail to govern the others righteously. Anger is considered an illegitimate power of rule through which the ruler can temporarily handle the uncontrollable situation.

Flattery in turn is a technique for the inferior other to deal with the superior's anger. It is a way for the inferior to win over the greater power he or she comes up against in the superior, a way for him or her to gain the superior's favor and benevolence. And the only appropriate technique for the inferior is logos. Foucault says, "He speaks, and it is by speaking that the inferior, boosting the superior's extra power as it were, can get what he wants from him. But in making use of the superior's superiority in this way, he reinforces it. He reinforces it since the flatterer is the person who gets what he wants.

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110 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 374.
111 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 375.
112 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 375.
from the superior by making him think that he is the most handsome, the wealthiest, the
most powerful, etcetera, or at any rate, wealthier, more handsome, and more powerful
than he is. In brief, the flatterer is a liar who does not let the superior know his or her
true self and “prevents the superior from taking care of himself properly.” Finally, the
flatterer can control the ruler or superior through projecting an unrealistic picture of him
or her or a distorted picture of reality.

For the Greeks, it is easier for the ruler to be deceived by the flatterer if he or she
does not practice the care of self regularly and properly. Foucault uses Seneca’s teaching
to illustrate the relation between failure of care of self and flattery. Seneca in the preface
of his fourth book, *Natural Questions*, told Lucilius, a procurator in Sicily, that he
conducted himself well as a procurator, because on the one hand he exercised his
functions properly, and on the other hand he cared for himself through giving himself a
free time to study. For Seneca, a studious free time is a “complement, accompaniment,
and regulative principle” that serves an art of the self, allowing the ruler to establish
an appropriate and sufficient relationship to himself or herself.

More important, Foucault says, care of the self ensures that “the individual does not

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113 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, pp. 375-6.
114 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 376.
115 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 377.
invest his own self, his own subjectivity, in the presumptuous delirium of a power that exceeds its real functions." If the ruler can regularly practice the care of self, then he or she can have a true self-understanding, including an appropriate understanding between the superior and the inferior. This means the ruler no longer needs the flatterer to tell him or her who he or she is. It leaves no room for the flatterer to manipulate the ruler through an inauthentic discourse: "...through the insufficiency of his relationship to himself, the flattered person finds himself dependent on the flatterer, on someone who is an other and who may therefore disappear or transform his flattery into wickedness, into a trap, etcetera. He is therefore dependent on this other, and what's more he is dependent on the duplicity of the flatterer's discourse." A flattered person is always the one who lacks proper self-understanding and care of the self.

The virtue of parrhēsia, for Foucault, is precisely anti-flattery, because discourse guided by the virtue of parrhēsia can help one establish a true and autonomous relationship to oneself: "in parrhēsia, there is indeed someone who speaks and speaks to the other but, unlike what happens in flattery, he speaks to the other in such a way that this other will be able to form an autonomous, independent, full and satisfying relationship to himself. The objective of parrhēsia is to act so that at a given moment the

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116 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 377.
117 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 378.
person to whom one is speaking finds himself in a situation in which he no longer needs
the other’s discourse.”¹¹⁸ Both flattery and parrhēsia are related to discursive formation.
Whereas the former can destroy the autonomy of the subject through masking the truth,
the latter can empower the subject through telling the truth: “The truth, passing from one
to the other in parrhēsia, seals, ensures, and guarantees the other’s autonomy, the
autonomy of the person who received the speech from the person who uttered it. This is
what I think can be said about the flattery/parrhēsia (speaking freely) opposition.”¹¹⁹
Although Foucault criticizes the manipulative and deceptive nature of flatterer’s
discourse, he does not give up the “redemptive function” of social discourse. Instead, he
discovers an ethics of discourse: the virtue of parrhēsia can make possible an ethics of
speaking truthfully.

Rhetoric is another problematic technique of discourse that fails to help an ethical
subject speak and search for truth. According to Foucault, the ancient Greeks believed
that rhetoric cannot establish truth. It is only “an art of persuading those to whom one is
speaking whether one wishes to convince them of a truth or a lie, a nontruth.”¹²⁰ For
Aristotle, rhetoric is a technique of persuading that ignores the question of content and

¹¹⁸ Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 379.
¹¹⁹ Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 379.
¹²⁰ Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 381.
the truth of discourse. Foucault summarizes the teaching of Quintillian: “a good general must be able to persuade his troops that the enemy they are about to confront is neither serious nor formidable when in actual fact he is. The good general must therefore persuade them with a lie. How will he do this? He will do this if, on the one hand, he knows the truth of the situation and if, on the other hand, he truly knows the means by which one can persuade someone by a lie as well as by a truth. Consequently, Quintillian knows how rhetoric as tekhnē is directly linked to a truth—the truth known, possessed, and controlled by the person speaking—but not to the truth of what is said and so not from the point of view of the person being spoken to.”¹²¹ In other words, the superior uses rhetoric to manipulate the inferior through persuading the inferior with lies or distorted facts. Such power functions through masking the truth. Thus, Foucault says, rhetoric is the art of lying because it denies truth.

Therefore, rhetoric is against the virtue of parrhēsia, which privileges a discourse of speaking free, containing no rhetorical adornment. Foucault says, “[t]here can only be truth in parrhēsia. Where there is no truth, there can be no speaking freely… Parrhēsia ensures in the most direct way this paradosis, this transfer of true discourse from the person who already possesses it to the person who must receive it, must be impregnated

¹²¹ Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 382.
by it, and who must be able to use it and subjectivize it. It is the instrument of this
transfer that does nothing other than put to work the truth of true discourse in all its naked
force, without adornment."\textsuperscript{122}  \textit{Parrhēsia} is truth because the speaking subject does care
whether or not the other can understand the original message of the discourse, so that the
speaking subject can get rid of any rhetorical techniques in order to transmit the message
with its naked force.

Another problem of rhetoric emerges when it is not governed by individual
relationships, by a face-to-face relationship, but by the subject matter. Cicero and
Quintillian say that rhetoric is defined by the subject matter one is dealing with.\textsuperscript{123}
Rhetoric is a game of the subject matter that privileges “how the discourse must be
organized, how the preamble must be constructed, how the \textit{narratio} (the account of
events) must be presented, and how arguments for and against must be discussed.”\textsuperscript{124}  In
other words, rhetoric is a disembodied way of speaking, because it only cares how the
subject matter can fit the rhetorical rules of discourses, but ignores the embodied life of
the communicative subject. It views communication as an instrumental communication
that denies the life of the communicative subject.

\textsuperscript{122} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 382.
\textsuperscript{123} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 383.
\textsuperscript{124} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 385.
Perhaps one could argue that it is not fair to say rhetoric ignores the interest of the communicative subject, since it still concerns the interest of the speaking subject. Yet, as was mentioned before, rhetoric uses lies to protect the interest of the speaker, not the interest of the listener. Thus it is a self-centered egoist discourse that fails to cultivate a life-enriching and authentic intersubjective communication. Since rhetoric enables one to influence deliberation in assembly, lead people and direct an army, it always makes one believe that it acts on behalf of others. But this neglects the fact that rhetoric is always to the greater advantage of the person speaking. In contrast, Foucault says, *parrhēsia* has a different purpose, where “the speaker attempts not to direct the other, but it involves acting on them so that they come to build up a relationship of sovereignty to themselves, with regards to themselves, typical of the wise and virtuous subject, of the subject who has attained all the happiness it is possible to attain in this world.” That is to say, the virtue of *parrhēsia* is a virtue that benefits both the other’s and the subject’s life. In particular, the subject who practices the ethics of *parrhēsia* has no personal interest in its exercise; rather he or she is driven by a virtue of generosity: “Generosity towards the other is at the very heart of the moral obligation of *parrhēsia*.”

125 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.
126 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.
127 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 385.
Furthermore, *parrhēsia* is also an ethics of mentorship, in which the mentors have to practice how to encourage, intensify, and enliven their students’ benevolence towards each other.\(^{128}\) Foucault says “the practice of free speech on the part of master must be such that it serves as encouragement, support, and opportunity for the students who will themselves also have the possibility, right, and obligation to speak freely.”\(^{129}\) In other words, *parrhēsia* does not cultivate the skill of speaking, but the ethics of speaking. It concerns how we can speak responsibly to the other so as to cultivate a culture of honesty and authenticity. In sum, *parrhēsia* makes possible an ideal communicative act between master and student in which truth-searching and virtue-cultivation can form a harmonic whole.

Simply put, *parrhēsia* is free speech, released from the manipulation of rhetorical rules and procedures. It takes into account the situation, the occasion, and the particularities of the other/listener over the speaking subject. Thus, it is speech that “is equivalent to commitment, to a bond, and which establishes a certain pact between the subject of enunciation and the subject of conduct. The subject who speaks commits himself … to do what he says and to be the subject of conduct who conforms in every

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\(^{128}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 389.

\(^{129}\) Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 389.
respect to the truth he expresses.”  

130 So an authentic human relationship is necessary for the cultivation of the virtue of parrhēsia. Foucault says it is a “relationships of shared lives, a long chain of living examples, as if passed on from hand to hand... I tell the truth, I tell you the truth. What authenticates the fact that I tell you the truth is that as subject of my conduct I really am, absolutely, integrally, and totally identical to the subject of enunciation I am when I tell you what I tell you.”  

131 In parrhēsia, what the subject speaks does not separate from how the subject acts. We can judge what the subject says from how the subject acts. Speech and act are united in the subject of enunciation. Since the virtuous life of the speaking subject is a testimony of the subject’s discourse, an authentic discourse can only be justified by a virtuous life of the speaking subject.

The late Foucault’s search for an ethics of truth from parrhēsia is compatible with his genealogical critique of truth, because both look for an ethical way of speaking and constructing truth. Thus, there is no split between the earlier and later stage of Foucault’s works. Although Foucault’s genealogical critique is a skeptical critique of different discourses of the scientific truth, his assertion of parrhēsia shows that he is not against truth; rather he looks for an ethics of truth that can help us speak truthfully. Bernauer says that what concerns the later Foucault are: “(1) What was it necessary to think today in

131 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 407.
contrast to the traditional domain of the thought-worthy? What should the substance for thought be? (2) In examining this domain, what sort of understanding should be sought? What mode of subjection should the thinker take up? (3) How should the search for such understanding find its methodological way? What ascetical practices must it perform on itself in order to be enabled to think differently? (4) What goal is pursued through the definition of substance, mode of subjection, and practice of asceticism? Foucault’s exploration of these questions throughout his works succeeded in creating a broad ethical inquiry on the activity of thought itself... [I]t provides not an obligatory conduct but a possible escape from an intellectual milieu unnourished by ethical interrogation.”132

3. Ethics of the Other

Some critics charge that Foucault’s assertion of the stylization of the self and care of the self is a celebration of individualism, love of self or dandyism. In particular, they claim that he totally ignores or rejects any ethics of the other promoted by contemporary postmodern ethics. After comparing Foucault and Levinas, Smart worries that Foucault’s care of self might diminish and undermine a responsibility for others, which Levinas tries to assert in his ethics of the other: “[t]he impression which emerges from Foucault’s work is of self-constitution or self-stylization as a relatively solitary or isolated process.

132 James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (ed.), The Final Foucault, p. 73.
Where, we might ask, is the interactional context? Where is the interest in social interaction between oneself and others made manifest? And does an approach to the question of self-formation or self-stylization, which appears to neglect social interaction, provide a sound basis for the cultivation of a modern ethics of existence?"133

McNay even charges that Foucault filters out a more communal and interactional notion of the self held by Greeks.134 That is to say, Foucault’s self is simply a disengaged self, without an inter-subjective dimension that contemporary feminists try to assert: “a more central problem with Foucault’s notion of an aesthetics of existence is that it privileges an undialectical and disengaged theory of self…. [T]his privileging of the isolated self in the idea of aesthetics of existence conflicts with recent feminist attempts to understand more fully the intersubjective dimension of social relations.”135 In other words, Foucault’s care of the self is simply an actualization of individualism or narcissism that eliminates an ethics of the other. To put it bluntly, Foucault’s ethics is a philosophy of narcissism.

In fact, Foucault is fully aware of this misinterpretation, which simply identifies the Greeks’ care of self as individualism or dandyism. He says that today the care of self

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134 Lois McNay, Foucault & Feminism, p. 165
135 Lois McNay, Foucault & Feminism, p. 157
seems like "a sort of challenge and defiance, a desire for radical ethical change, a sort of moral dandyism, the assertion-challenge of a fixed aesthetic and individual stage. Or else they sound to us like a somewhat melancholy and sad expression of the withdrawal of the individual who is unable to hold on to and keep firmly before his eyes, in his grasp and for himself, a collective morality (that of the city-state, for example), and who, faced with the disintegration of this collective morality, has naught else to do but attend to himself." For Foucault, however, the original meaning of care of self is not a conservative apolitical ethics that discourages the subject from getting involved in any public affairs. In contrast, the Greek notion of care of self is about governing the other through different embodied virtuous practices: "[t]he care of the self is ethical in itself; but it implies complex relationships with others insofar as this \ethos\ of freedom is also a way of caring for others. This is why it is important for a free man who conducts himself as he should to be able to govern his wife, his children, his household; it is also the art of governing." In other words, care of the self is finally about the governing of the other. It is basically about the making of civil ethics. Pinto rightly claims that for Foucault the mastery of the self as a technique of care of self "though embedded in the cult of a deeply

asymmetrical aristocratic virility, had no other scope than the right government of others. 138 This includes letting one have one’s rightful position in the city, the community or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend.

Thus, it is not fair to identify Foucault’s care of the self as an individualism or narcissism that allegedly fails to see how care of the self can prepare one to serve or love the other. Although the Greeks emphasize care of the self, they do not negate the other, and neither does Foucault. Like the Greeks, Foucault never separates care of the self from care of the other. Accordingly, if one cannot take care of oneself properly and kindly, one never treats the others in the same manner. Thus, care of the self is a necessary condition of care of the other. As Foucault says, Greek ethics does not put care of the other before the care of the self in the sense that the care of the self is ontologically prior. 139

3.1 Ethics of the Other in Governing

Some critics also charge that the later Foucault’s aesthetic and ethical turn to care of self is an apolitical turn that fails to take account the power relation between self and other. Martha Nussbaum charges that Foucault has retreated from his earlier views about “the inseparability of ideas and institutions.” 140 Jon Simons claims that Foucault has

139 Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 287.
separated "ethics as much as possible from the axis of political power in his analysis of Greek and Hellenist [sic] arts of the self."\textsuperscript{141} Again, their interpretations of the later Foucault as an "apolitical Foucault" are not fair since they do not take into account Foucault's \textit{Hermeneutics of the Subject}, where he discusses the ethics of the other in governing.

\textit{In Hermeneutics of the Subject}, Foucault attempts to show how Greek ethics emphasizes care of the self, without ignoring the importance of the ethics of the other in a political context. Foucault argues that care of the self, for Plato, occurs as an ethical practice of care of the other, which was commonly regarded as a virtue of governing. For Plato, care of the self clearly opens out onto the question of the city-state, of others, of the political. In \textit{Alcibiades}, after Socrates' lesson, Alcibiades learns that his concern for the soul and care of the soul are about a governing of the soul; and if he can govern his soul properly and regularly, he will be capable of watching over the city, safeguarding its laws and constitution, and maintaining the right balance between citizens. In other words, care of the self is related to governing others righteously.\textsuperscript{142}

According to Foucault, Plato has established the link between care of self and care

\textsuperscript{142} Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 175.
of others in three ways. First, there is a functional relation between care of the self and care of the others because one makes oneself capable of taking care of the others by taking care of oneself. Foucault says, "I practice on myself what the Neo-Platonists call katharsis, and I practice this art of cathartic precisely so that I can become a political subject in the sense of someone who knows what politics is and as a result can govern." In other words, the ethical identity of the political subject is determined by whether he or she can regularly practice catharsis. That is to say, if one can take care of oneself, one can have a proper knowledge of the political technique that makes one take care of the others. Here we see that Plato does not separate the cathartic and the political. That is to say, governing is not only a technique of governing, but also a virtue of governing, which demands a total transformation of the ruler’s inner spiritual life.

Second, there is a link of reciprocity between care of self and care of other. If the ruler can bring prosperity for the citizens as the result of his or her care of the self, then the ruler can benefit from the prosperity of all and from the salvation and victory of the city that he or she has ensured. In other words, as Foucault says, “the care of the self therefore finds its reward and guarantee in the city’s salvation. One saves oneself inasmuch as the city-state is saved, and inasmuch as one has enabled it to be saved by

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143 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 175.
144 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 175.
taking care of oneself. "145 Care of the self and care of the other relate reciprocally. The subject, who takes care of the other, is likely to be rewarded by the other. That is to say, the subject and other have a symmetrical relationship.

Third, for Plato, the subject can finally discover its being and knowledge through practicing the care of the self. Foucault says, "...by taking care of itself, by practicing the ‘cathartic of the self’ (not a Platonic but a Neo-Platonic term), the soul discovers both what it is and what it knows, or rather, what it has always known. It discovers both its being and its knowledge at the same time. It discovers what it is, and in the form of memory it discovers what it has contemplated. In this way, in this act of memory, it can get back to the contemplation of the truths that enable the city’s order to be founded anew in full justice."146 In other words, care of the self finally generates a knowledge that can keep the city’s order in full justice. Thus, we cannot say that care of the self is apolitical because care of the self can make possible a righteous civic order.

Even if care of the self can lead to the care of the other, however, can we be so certain that the subject will also treat the other with care? How do we guarantee that the subject will treat the other ethically in governing? Foucault argues that we treat the other badly only because we cannot properly care ourselves: "... the risk of dominating others

145 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 176.
146 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 176.
and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one’s desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household in an oikos, if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death—if you know all this, you cannot abuse power over others.147 That is to say, if one can practice the care of the self wholeheartedly, and knows what it means to be a master, then one will not abuse the power when one governs the other. It seems to me that Foucault has great confidence in Greek practices and teachings on governing. He thinks that the subject can govern the other righteously and non-violently only if the subject can first love his or her life.

3.2 Ethics of the Other in Mentoring

Greek ethics of the other is also actualized in Greek mentorship, which privileges the student’s interest over the mentor’s interests. In Greek ethics, mentorship is important in helping the subject search his or her life.148 Foucault says that three types of relationship are indispensable for the young man’s training. First, mentorship occurs through example,

147 Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 288.
148 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 128.
in which the master offers a model of behavior to the younger person. Second is the
mastery of competence, in which the master passes on knowledge, principle and abilities
to the students. Third is the Socratic mastery of dilemma and discovery practiced through
dialogue.

Interestingly, each of these three mastery rests on a particular interplay of ignorance
and memory; and the aim of mentorship is to free the young people from ignorance. That
is to say, Greek mentorship aims at turning the subject into an independent and mature
subject who has the wisdom of life. Thus, the young person needs to learn from the
mentor the technique and knowledge that will enable him or her to live properly. These
practices of mastery function on the basis of ignorance and memory, because memory
enables one to pass from ignorance to non-ignorance and from ignorance to knowledge,
as Socrates believed.149

The master trains the subject. Seneca refers to stultitia, which is the mental
restlessness of someone who is never satisfied by anything or settled by anything. Seneca
believes that anyone who is in the status of stultitia does not care for himself or herself.150

The stultus is someone who lets all the representations from the outside world into his or
her mind. He or she accepts these representations without examining them, without

149 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 129.
150 Michel Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, p. 131.
knowing how to analyze what they represent; he or she does not make judgment, and lets life pass by.\textsuperscript{151} The \textit{stultus} is essentially someone who does not will oneself and does not want the self. In \textit{stultitia}, there is a disconnection between the will and the self.\textsuperscript{152}

The intervention of the master is important by helping the student not to be a \textit{stultus}.\textsuperscript{153} The one who helps the \textit{stultus} is the one who has achieved a relationship of self-control, self-possession, and pleasure in the self. This is the objective of \textit{sapientia}.

That is to say, the teacher is the one who can exercise his or her sovereignty over himself or herself and can find his or her entire happiness in this relationship. The philosopher is this effective agent.\textsuperscript{154} This idea is found among the Epicureans: Epicurus says only the philosopher is capable of guiding others. Philosophy is the set of principles and practices available for such guidance.\textsuperscript{155}

Furthermore, the philosopher is also a private counselor.\textsuperscript{156} He or she is a counselor of existence, who gives his or her view on specific occasion. This philosopher/counselor initiates the student into a particular form of life. In other words, the counselor is also a cultural agent for a circle into which he/she introduces both theoretical and practical schemas of life as well as political choice. The philosopher/counselor integrates

\begin{itemize}
  \item Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 131.
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  \item Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 136.
  \item Michel Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, p. 142.
\end{itemize}
philosophy into the daily mode of being.

As was mentioned before, it is inaccurate to identify Foucault’s care of the self as mere individualism, egoism or narcissism. In discussing the role of the mentor, for example, Foucault tries to distinguish care of the self from three other types of self-centered activity: the activities of the doctor, the head of the household and the lover. Foucault argues that, when a doctor applies the art of medicine to himself or herself when he or she is ill, this is not a kind of care of the self because the doctor does not view himself or herself as a soul-subject but cares only for the body, not the doctor’s subjectivity. The main distinction is that the *tekhnē* of the doctor cannot transform himself or herself as subject, whereas the *tekhnē* of care of the self enables the individual who takes care of himself or herself to become a subject. In other words, Foucault is concerned with whether or not the technique of the self can truly make us be a subject.¹⁵⁷

Second, we cannot say a good father takes care of himself when he takes care of his wealth, because he takes care of the wealth that belongs to him, but not of himself. Third, we also cannot say Alcibiades’ suitors take care of Alcibiades himself, because they only love Alcibiades’ body and beauty, not Alcibiades himself. To take care of Alcibiades means attending to his soul and making good use of his body and its capacities and

¹⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 58.
aptitudes. Socrates takes care of Alcibiades, including his soul, because he can wait until Alcibiades has grown old and lost his beauty. Thus, unlike other of Alcibiades’ lovers and suitors, Socrates cares about the way in which Alcibiades will be concerned about himself. And, Foucault says, this is the true meaning of care for self and other.

Foucault argues that care of the self always goes through the relationship to someone else who is the master. One cannot care for the self without the presence of the master. However, the master’s position is defined by what he or she cares about. Unlike the doctor, the master is not concerned with the body. Unlike the teacher, the master is not concerned with teaching attitudes to the person he or she guides. According to Foucault, “the master is the person who cares about the subject’s care for himself, and who finds in his love for his disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple’s care for himself.”

Thus, Foucault does not reject mentorship even though he criticizes the Christian way of mentorship, the confession. From his rejection of Christian confession and affirmation of Greek mentorship, we may see that what Foucault rejects is not mentorship per se, but a manipulative form of mentorship that fails to take the other/student’s life as the core of concern. The confession is problematic because it aims at controlling the believer’s behavior for the sake of maintaining the status quo of the church without

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158 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 59.
taking care of the believer’s interest. More important, the confession does not leave
“room” for the other to cultivate his or her free subjectivity with the help of the priest, the
master. In contrast, Greek mentorship emphasizes the master’s responsibility in helping
the other to build up his or her subjectivity, in which the autonomy of the subject is fully
respected.

D. Conclusion

Although Foucault is commonly regarded as an anti-moral social constructivist or
anti-essentialist who treats all moral discourses as repressive discourse, this chapter has
argued that the later Foucault fully affirms one’s ethical formation, given that one’s
ethical life is cultivated in a free and non-coercive manner. While Foucault is commonly
regarded as a hedonist, who simply affirms self-gratification, the later Foucault shows us
that he is not unaware of the problem of the excess use of desire or pleasure.

In addition, while Foucault is commonly regarded as a genealogist who criticizes
different discourses of truth that repress the body, the later Foucault fully affirms an
embodied truth that mingle bodily transformation and truth-searching. That is to say,
Foucault does not reject all kinds of “truth.” Instead, he accepts a kind of truth that arises
from one’s bodily transformation. In other words, for Foucault, the lived body, which
includes desire and bodily sensation, is a necessary condition for building up an
embodied virtue ethics and an embodied epistemology in response to the crisis brought by Christianity and rationalism.

Furthermore, while the later Foucault’s care of the self has been labeled as individualism or dandyism, this chapter has argued that the later Foucault’s care of the self also affirms the necessity of care of the other. For him, care of the self must lead to care of the other. That is to say, care of the self is the necessary condition for care of the other. Moreover, while Foucault rejects Christian confession, he accepts Greek mentorship because the latter can truly respect the interest of the student (the other). Thus, Foucault does not reject all kinds of mentorship or pedagogy; rather his concern is whether the mentorship occurs within the boundary of respect and love so that masters can teach their students to care for their bodily life.

In sum, Foucault does not treat stylization of self as simply a symbolic subversion or aesthetic transgression towards the dominant culture, as some social constructivists believe. Rather, he believes that one’s bodily stylization not only transgresses some repressive boundaries but also forms an ethical embodied life that respects one’s freedom.

In contemporary French philosophical circles, Foucault is not the only one who emphasizes the bodily dimension of ethics and the ethical dimension of the body. In the next chapter, I shall explore the thought of another French philosopher, namely,
Emmanuel Levinas. From his phenomenological approach to the ethical dimension of bodily sensation, we may see how the body and the other’s body make possible an embodied ethics and an embodied subjectivity. In particular, we may see how the subject’s sensation makes possible an ethics of the other.

If we can regard Foucault’s ethics as an ethics of care of the self, then we can regard Levinas’ ethics as an ethics of care of the other. For Foucault, care of the self is a necessary condition of care of the other because the self is ethical in itself; but for Levinas, the self can never be ethical in itself, and the ethical subjectivity of the self is only made possible through taking care of the other first. That is to say, for Foucault, ethical subjectivity can be attained without the intervention of the other, whereas for Levinas, the intervention of the other is the necessary condition in terms of making an ethical subjectivity. Yet, although their ethical approaches take different directions, they treat the lived body as the necessary condition of ethics. For them, this is the only way to respond to the moral crisis brought by modernity.
Chapter Three. Levinas on the Body and Ethics

A. Levinas: Towards an Ethical Understanding of the Embodied Subject

Having looked at Foucault’s notion of the body and ethics, I will now examine Levinas’ embodied ethics. Levinas’ embodied ethics shares the focus of Foucault’s embodied ethics, treating the body as a necessary ground of making up an ethical subjectivity and criticizing a rational and legalistic notion of morality. They agree that one’s ethical identity is primarily conditioned or determined by one’s bodily life, not by a rule or social norm. But, unlike Foucault, Levinas does not view the subject per se as a self-sufficient ethical subject that can simply construct its own ethical identity through practicing different bodily exercises and techniques of care of the self without the intervention of the other. Rather, for Levinas, the construction of ethical subjectivity is not possible without the intervention of the other’s bodily life. Unlike the active nature of Foucault’s ethical embodied subject who can care for his or her bodily life either through cultivation or mentorship, Levinas’ ethical embodied subject is totally passive, having an ethical identity mediated by the subject’s passive exposure of his or her body to the other’s fragile bodily life.

For Levinas, one never escapes the other’s moral urge in one’s life since the other’s
fragile bodily life is already incarnated in one’s bodily life. The other’s fragile face, which serves as an irresistible moral urge, not only demands the subject to take responsibility for his or her life, but also demands the subject to risk his or her life for the other. For Levinas, the subject cannot reject the “moral urge” of the other since the urge is mediated through the subject’s bodily and sensual experience and not through the subject’s consciousness or any intermediation of concept. The other’s moral urge is given through the sense-bestowing function of the pre-original accusation of the other’s face that not only commands the subject but also makes the subject susceptible to trauma and pain prior to the subject’s will. In other words, it is the “affective content” not the “representational content” of the face of other that enables the subject to respond the need of the other.

Thus, for Levinas, the subject’s ethical identity is formed by a passive bodily exposure towards the other; the essence of the subject’s ethical body is determined by an incarnated relationship with the other’s body. Levinas regards such incarnated relationship as proximity. As John Drabinski rightly says: “The essence of the ethical body, for Levinas, lies in the materiality of its proximity to the other. The materiality of the body in proximity to the face of the Other is described as the exposure of the body. Exposure as the condition of the ethical subject makes a reversal of the constitution of the
subject's identity possible... The vulnerable skin of the subject bears the trace of the hither-side. The exposed body is marked concretely, in its vulnerability, by the pre-history of the I."¹

Thus, Levinas’ subject is an ethical embodied subject. First, the subject’s ethical sense and identity are formed through his or her passive bodily exposure towards the other’s fragile body. The other’s bodily life is already incarnated in the subject’s bodily life. Second, what connects the subject to the other’s moral urge is not the subject’s intention or will, but the subject’s bodily sensation. One’s bodily sensation serves as a primary mode prior to will or consciousness that makes the subject ethical. Simply, one’s bodily exposure conditions one’s ethical identity.

This chapter will explore how Levinas’ ethical subjectivity is made possible through the intervention of the other, in which the bodily sensation serves as an important condition in relating the subject and the other in a non-violent way. I argue that, although Levinas criticizes a universal and ontological notion of human beings, this does not mean that he no longer looks for an ethical ground for the value of human beings. This is because Levinas’ critique of rationalism and ontology does not reject the existence of the lived body, nor does it reduce the lived body to the linguistically constructed body as

¹ John E. Drabinski, Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas (Albany: State
some anti-essentialist thinkers such as Butler do. Rather, Levinas recognizes the ethical potentiality of the bodily sensation that generates an embodied ethics to replace a dogmatic disembodied ethics. Thus, this chapter not only examines how Levinas understands and criticizes essentialism and rationalism but also sees how he constructs an embodied ethics and an embodied subject after the critique of rationalism.

B. Levinas’ Critique of Rationalism and Its Repression of Body/Sensation: Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger

Because Western philosophy has been obsessed with an ontological understanding of Being, it has treated the subject as an epistemological subject who can grasp the other and the world conceptually and rationally. Western philosophers and scientists have treated human beings (the other) and world as graspable and static objects so as to build up different knowledge systems that can apprehend the essence of the world and human beings. Levinas’ critical project challenges such an ontological understanding of the world and the subject, which he thinks has destroyed, neglected, and forgotten the otherness and infinity of the other: “philosophy has lost its place at the top. Its desire for an overall and absolute knowledge expresses its desire of possessing and mastering conceptually the universe from an absolute standpoint: the standpoint of an unshaken and

unconquerable ego."² For Levinas, the rational apprehension of the other and the world is attached to the subject’s desire and power of mastering the universe and the other via knowledge and ontology.

According to Levinas, the desire to grasp the other and the world through knowledge has turned the human subject into an egoistic as well as a manipulative subject. Thus, Western rational philosophy is a form of egoism. Like Foucault, Levinas criticizes Descartes and rationalism since they simply reduce the subject to a rational conscious subject. More important, Levinas stresses that the problem of the Cartesian subject and the rational subject in general is its disembodiment: the ethical potentiality of the body cannot be recognized since the body or bodily sensation is treated as an “inferior material” that cannot offer a “stable material” for the subject’s mind to manipulate.

Although both Foucault and Levinas criticize rationalism and its hierarchical understandings of body and mind, the theoretical ground of their critiques is different. Foucault’s critique is a genealogical critique. It explores critically how rational and scientific discourses have served as a manipulative and productive power towards the subject. But Levinas’ critique is a phenomenological critique, through which he shows how Descartes, Husserl, and Heidegger’s notions of human consciousness (Descartes and

²Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Evanston, IL: Northwestern
Husserl) and understanding (Heidegger) serve as the most primordial mode of the subject that finally generates an immanent violence towards the other. Levinas worries that human consciousness, which aims at theorizing everything through finite concepts, finally domesticates the infinity of other.

Thus, the starting point of Levinas' ethics is to interrogate how modern Western philosophy, especially rationalism, generates immanent violence towards the other. Then he reasserts an ethical embodied relation between subject and other that precedes the conceptual or epistemological relation between subject and other sustained by traditional Western philosophy. Brian Schroeder regards Levinas' critique of consciousness as a "deconceptualization of metaphysics," an "attempt not only to decenter onto(theso)logical discourse, but to stress that the metaphysical-ethical (identical terms for Levinas) relation not only precedes determination by self-same consciousness, but is contingent upon a certain refusal on the part of the selfsame to conceptually totalize the other. Levinas' reformulation of metaphysics emphasizes the radical alterity (altérité) and the ethical supremacy of the Other (l'autrui), insists on the priority of difference over identity, and contests the logic of Western philosophy both traditional and Hegelian, at its very core."3

This section will explore Levinas' phenomenological critique of three

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1 University Press, 1997), p. 34.

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philosophers—Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger—who highlight the totalizing power of the consciousness towards the alterity of the other.

1. Hegel

For Levinas, the problem of the Western philosophy is that it takes searching for universal knowledge to be the most important task of philosophy, thereby reducing subjectivity to only a conscious subject.\(^4\) Once consciousness is treated as the basis for defining the essence of the world and the other, Levinas argues, at least two problems arise. First, the subject becomes the source of the meaning of the world, in the sense that he or she is the master who can determine this meaning. Levinas calls this an ontological understanding of the world. Second, the distinction between subject and being is collapsed or confused, such that the world or the other becomes the projection of the subject: "Hegel and Heidegger try to empty the distinction between the subject and being of its meaning. In reintroducing time into being they denounce the idea of a subjectivity irreducible to essence, and, starting with the object inseparable from the subject, go on to reduce their correlation, and the anthropological order understood in these terms, to a modality of being."\(^5\)

\(^5\) Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 17.
subjectivity and the knowable. In the end consciousness fulfills the being of entities. That is to say, Hegel understands essence as the immanence of a knowing and reduces it to “a moment of the concept, of thought or of absolute essence.”⁶

For Levinas, the problem of Hegel’s system is that it not only turns the subject into an absolute knower but also reduces the otherness of the world and the other to a concept or an absolute essence, so that it allows no “room” for infinity. The infinity of the other is either domesticated by consciousness or treated as an abstract universality. Levinas says that infinity does not enter into the idea of infinity, and cannot be grasped. The infinite is “the radically, absolute, other.”⁷ As Levinas says, “For the venerable tradition to which Hegel refers, the ego is an equality with itself, and consequently the return of being to itself is a concrete universality, being having separated itself from itself in the universality of the concept and death.”⁸ In other words, universality ignores or negates particularity by turning it into an abstract universal rule, Spirit or a conceptual dialectic. In particular, universality represses the otherness of the singular person and reduces the otherness of human being to a concept or theme, thereby making the subject faceless. As Brian Schroeder says, “[a]ccording to Hegel, subjectivity is fully realized in its

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⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 17.
⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 115.
conceptual dialectical relation with its other. This relation is predicated upon the concept of *totality*, a concept that logically equates otherness with non-being, and being with nothingness. The totality of Spirit is infinite becoming for Hegel... He [Levinas] argues that the dissimulation and reconstruction of the Other into the simulated order of a conceptual totality is violent in that it makes faceless the individual existent and strips away one’s primal alterity.”

Thus, the violence of the immanence of consciousness, as the cogito, destroys the otherness of the world and human beings. Hegel or Hegelianism “has accustomed us to think that truth no longer resides in the evidence acquired by myself, that is, in the evidence sustained by the exceptional form of the *cogito*, which, strong in its first person form, would be first in everything. It has made us think that it rather resides in the unsurpassable plenitude of the content thought. In our days, truth is taken to result from the effacing of the living man behind the mathematical structures that *think themselves out* in him, rather than he be thinking them.” In fact, Levinas worries that the tendency of domination that is already embedded in the cogito might be further manifested as political power and violence in that the individual is subordinated to rational movement within the rational and mathematical structure. In other words, Levinas’ critique of the

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Hegel’s universalism is not simply a “deconceptualization of metaphysics”; rather it is also a political critique of power.

2. Husserl

Levinas says that Husserl is the origin of his writing, having taught him that the thought--object, theme, meaning--refers back to the thought that thinks it, and also determines the subjective articulation of its appearing: being determines its phenomena.11 Levinas claims this is the essential contribution of phenomenology.12 For Levinas, the contribution of Husserl’s phenomenology is to develop a rigorous philosophy in which Being is defined as meaning in its givenness to consciousness. For Husserl, “Being is neither an appearance behind which some thing or some structure is ruling, nor anything behind the appearances, but that which is meaningfully present to consciousness.”13

Being has two fundamental modes: the being of the objects of external perception and the being of consciousness. These two modes are structured in a harmonic relation. Levinas explains: “The phenomenon of the world is precisely that: the fact that there is a guaranteed harmony, in the act of grasping, between the thinkable and the thinking, that the appearing of the world is also a giving of itself, and that the knowledge of it is a

10 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, pp. 57-8.
satisfaction, as if it fulfilled a need. Perhaps this is why Husserl describes theoretical knowledge in its most accomplished forms—objectifying and thematizing knowledge—as fulfilling the intention—empty intentionality fulfilling itself. In other words, the essence and meaning of the object fulfill intentionality.

For Levinas, the problem of Husserl’s phenomenology is its privileging the theoretical, knowing, representation and the ontological meaning of being, in which the otherness and exteriority of the self is recaptured in immanence. More important, it totally negates the importance of bodily sensuality or the role of the lived body. Husserl’s new ontology of consciousness puts the sensorial impression and consciousness together in order to domesticate the flow of the sensory experience. For Levinas, such an ontological understanding of consciousness is basically a repression of sensing to the extent it ignores the ethical function or the nature of bodily sensation. (A detailed account of this process will be discussed later.)

Of course, we should not say that Husserl totally neglects the importance of sensation since sensation is an important means to supply the material to consciousness, without which consciousness is nothing. But the problem is that Husserl treats sensibility

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13 Adriaan Peperzak, Beyond, p. 40.
14 Emmanuel Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness,” p. 126
16 Emmanuel Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness,” p. 124
17 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 32.
as only a vehicle to transmit raw material to consciousness so as to enable consciousness
to present it as a stable image and representation. The flow of the lived experience
attached to the sensibility is finally reduced to pure immanent object domesticated by
intentionality. In other words, Husserl fails to recognize the ethical nature of a “raw
sensory experience,” the lived sensory experience that can help the subject get in touch
with the vulnerability of the other.

For Levinas, the immediacy of the sensible serves as one of the necessary conditions
for the subject to build up an ethical relationship with the transcendent other. Because the
bodily sensation can make the subject sense the suffering face of the other, the subject
can respond to the need of the other immediately. Levinas argues that, since Husserl’s
intuition conceptualizes all sensible experiences, intention has lost the immediacy of the
sensible.¹⁸ Thus, Husserl’s subject fails to sense the suffering of the other. Moreover, the
image generated by intention (knowing) always represses the immediacy between the
subject’s body and the other’s body. Suppression of the sensible can never make possible
a truly ethical embodied communication between subject and other, because the
disembodiment of knowing denies sensibility and bodily communication. Rather it only
makes possible a disembodied communication that privileges the analytical, synthetical,

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, pp. 62-3.
dialectical exchange of ideas. Levinas regards such a disembodied communication as non-ethical communication.

Moreover, Husserl’s desire to grasp the objectivity of the world makes his model privilege a synchronic mode of time over a diachronic mode of time, because only the former enables the conscious subject to capture and stabilize the unstable object. For Husserl, the time structure of sensibility is a time of what can be captured. The notion of the living present and the notion of the origin have to be intelligible so that the consciousness can thematize the present moment/time. Levinas says, “We find in Husserl a privilege of presence, of the present, and of representation. The dia-chrony of time is almost always interpreted as a privation of synchrony. The coming to be of the future is understood in terms of protention, as if the temporality of the future were only a kind of taking in hand, an attempt at recuperation, as if the coming to be of the future were only the entrance of a present.” Whereas Husserl’s time model privileges the synchronic mode of time, the intervention of the other, as before and as after the subject, is always beyond the synchronic mode of time and belongs to the diachronic mode of time. Thus, Husserl’s privileging the synchronic time model would finally repress the infinity of the other through subsuming the other into a synchronic model. That is to say, it synthesizes

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19 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 34.
alterity into the same. Levinas prefers the diachronic mode of time to the synchronic mode of time because the former can retain the “past” or “time” in the Ur-impression, a primary impression, which is still non-modified by consciousness. Such a model of time makes possible the intervention of the other towards the subject.

3. Heidegger

Heidegger’s notion of human being (Dasein) is not a static form of essentialism in which the essence of human being is pre-given. His philosophical anthropology presumes that the being of Dasein is disclosed in the process of his or her self-understanding. That is to say, the “essence” of Dasein is always in making and becoming, not pre-given. However, while Heidegger is regarded as an anti-humanist philosopher, critical of the Cartesian rational subject, Heidegger’s proposal is still not radical enough for Levinas, because it treats comprehension not sensibility as the basic mode of human being. Levinas says that, although Heidegger views understanding as a “contextual understanding” constituted by temporality, distinct from Cartesian notion of “context-free understanding,” he still treats understanding as the most basic ontological mode of Dasein through which Dasein makes sense of the world and the other. In other words, Heidegger’s Dasein is still a sense-making subject, for which comprehension or understanding is the most basic mode.

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20 Emmanuel Levinas, “Nonintentional Consciousness”, p. 125.
of existence.

While Heidegger claims that a cognitive model is the fundamental model of human being, Levinas argues that enjoyment, a sensual activity, is the basic mode of living. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas charges that Heidegger's Dasein is not hungry: "Heidegger does not take the relation of enjoyment into consideration."21 For Levinas, enjoyment is "an ultimate relation with the substantial plenitude of being, with its materiality that embraces all relations with things."22 That is to say, Levinas views the basic form of the self as a sensual self, not a cognitive self. Bodily sensibility, not cognition, serves as a basic mode of existence, in the sense that sensibility is prior to reason. Levinas says, "I am myself, I am here, at home with myself, inhabitation, immanence in the world. My sensibility is here. In my position there is not the sentiment of localization, but the localization of my sensibility."23 For Levinas, it is sensibility that makes the sense of existence possible.

According to Levinas, because Heidegger's notion of being cannot detach from the conscious being that he criticizes, being in Heidegger's project is still domesticated by consciousness, even though consciousness per se is bounded by temporality:

22 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 133.
“Heidegger’s being-in-the-world is a comprehension: technological activity itself is openness, discovery of Being, even if in the mode of a forgetting of Being. The ontic, which at least involves an opaqueness, everywhere yields before the ontological, before a covered-over luminosity to be disengaged. The existentiell reveals its meaning in the existential, which is an articulation of ontology. An entity counts only on the basis of knowing, of appearing, of phenomenology.”24 Although Dasein does not comprehend the world via the invention of theory or method, Levinas argues that the Heideggerian model still maintains the founding primacy of cognition that makes the subject attach to knowing and showing effected by intentionality.25

For Levinas, Heidegger’s privileging the mind, rather than sensibility and the body, generates a dualist rationalist ideology that makes the subject perceive the world and the other in a disembodied way. Since cognition requires the subject to repress his or her feeling or emotion while apprehending the world and the other, this makes the subject fail to “sense” the world and the other with his or her body. Thus, Heidegger’s privileging the subject’s understanding is inconsistent with his anti-rationalism, because both Heidegger and the rationalists assert a disembodied cognitive model. Tina Chanter charges that Heidegger’s privileging of understanding cannot consider the importance of the subject’s

24 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 80.
bodily experience, and this makes his project remain consonant with the disembodied transcendental subjectivity presumed by the rationalism that he rejects: "Heidegger's account of Dasein remains more consonant with the disembodied transcendental subject that Kant inherited from Descartes than Heidegger admits... Except insofar as bodies signify as a contributing factor to the meaning of Dasein's projects, and their significance is thereby subsumed by Dasein's ways of understanding, Heidegger pays very little attention to them."26 For Levinas, then, Heidegger's Dasein is anonymous due to his failure to take seriously the concrete bodily experience: "[t]he Heideggerian being-with-one-another [das Miteinandersein] appears to me always like marching-together. That is not for me; there is no face there. However, being-toward-the-other is not an anonymous relation."27 In other words, for Levinas, Heidegger's negation of the body not only fails to make his project become a truly radical anti-rationalist project but also fails to develop an embodied ethical relationship with the other.

In sum, for Levinas, the problem of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger is their assertion of human cognition that treats consciousness or intentionality as the most elementary

capacity of human being. This either generates an immanent violence towards the other or fails to take into account the ethical potentiality of the body/bodily sensation. Levinas’ project not only criticizes rationalism and its repression of the body but also reconstructs an ethical embodied subject and an ethical relationship with the other. In other words, Levinas searches for a new ethical ground for the ethical life of human beings after the critique of rationalism. As a phenomenologist, Levinas asks, if the most basic form of intersubjective life should not be built upon an epistemological relation that privileges cognition and understanding, then what kind of pre-theoretical relation should be built upon after the critique of rationalism? Levinas argues that the most basic form of intersubjective life should be first an ethical relation mediated through bodily sensibility, not through consciousness. That, he thinks, is the only way to make possible a new ethical life after the critique of rationalism. The next section will explore the content of Levinas’ ethical embodied subject, through which a radical embodied ethics is also articulated.

C. Levinas on the Ethical Embodied Subject

Perhaps one could ask, should we not treat Levinas as an anti-subjectivist or anti-humanist philosopher, due to his radical rejection of the conscious subject and of an essentialist understanding of human being? Does not his radical rejection of subjectivity
make Levinas only a philosopher of the other? Does Levinas' anti-essentialism generate an ethically ungrounded understanding of human being? I think we cannot do justice to Levinas' work if we treat his philosophy as simply a philosophy of anti-subjectivity or a philosophy of the other without considering his constructive understanding of subjectivity.

Because the main theme of Levinas' earlier work *Totality and Infinity* is to save the other from being totalized by Western ontology, some philosophers regard Levinas as only a philosopher of the "other." For instance, Alain Badiou's critique of Levinas' ethics rests on such a popular understanding and regards his ethics as undesirably religious due to his obsession with the absolute Other. If the religious element in Levinas' ethics is taken away, Badiou says, nothing but a "dog's dinner" remains, a "pious discourse without piety."28 Similarly, in his brief introduction to Levinas' thought for an anthology on twentieth-century continental philosophy, William Desmond regards *Totality and Infinity* as Levinas' only mature work on the topic of the Other, and reads his later work *Otherwise than Being* as merely a supplement of his earlier discussion on the responsibility for the other. Desmond seems not to be fully aware of a new ethical

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subjectivity that Levinas articulates in Otherwise than Being.²⁹

I argue in this chapter that while Levinas’ project emphasizes the other, the making of
the ethical embodied subject is the main concern of his work. That is to say, Levinas’
affirmation of the other is for the sake of building a new metaphysical understanding of
the embodied ethical subject to replace the egoist subject. As Simon Critchley rightly
states, “Subjectivity is a central and constant theme in Levinas’s work,”³⁰ and “the
precondition of the ethical relation to the other is found in Levinas’s picture of the ethical
subject.”³¹ Peperzak also argues that Otherwise than Being is concerned more with the
position and meaning of the subject than with the other.³² That is to say, Levinas does not
neglect the importance of the subject, despite his critique of the rational subject. We
should read his emphasis on the other as a preparation for the “birth” of an ethical subject.

Although in Totality and Infinity Levinas treats the intervention of the other as a way of
subverting the rational subject, this does not mean that he abandons the subject. In the
preface of Totality and Infinity, Levinas says: “This book then does present itself as a
defense of subjectivity, but it will apprehend the subjectivity not at the level of its purely

³⁰ Simon Critchley and Peter Dews (eds.), Deconstructive Subjectivities (Albany: State University of New
³¹ Simon Critchley, Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance (London: Verso,
³² Adriaan Peperzak, To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (West
egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death, but as founded in the idea of infinity.”

Thus, Levinas’ rejection of the conscious subject does not mean that he wants to destroy the subject or denies an ethical understanding of human being; rather his project attempts to redeem the subject from being totalized by consciousness and intentionality. In other words, Levinas tries to explore whether understanding the subject as a conscious subject is an ideal understanding of subjectivity. If consciousness or reason is not definitive of the subject, then what can truly constitute a nonviolent ethical subject who can also show responsibility towards the other? For Levinas, this is a very important ethical issue after the Holocaust, because the Holocaust challenges us to think of the limited, violent and unethical character of rationality, especially its violent attitude towards the other.

In the following subsection, I will explore how Levinas constructs an ethical embodied subject that he thinks can replace a rational subject. In particular, I will show that Levinas’ subject cannot become ethical in itself; rather it is the intervention of the other that makes the subject ethical. In other words, the subject becomes ethical only through taking care of the other, not through taking care of the self. Furthermore, I also

want to argue that Levinas’ subject is an ethical embodied subject because the subject’s ethical response towards the other is only possible with the aid of the bodily sensibility. Although my analysis rests on his later work *Otherwise than Being*, I will first discuss his earlier work *Totality and Infinity*.

1. Levinas on Sensibility in *Totality and Infinity*

This subsection will explore how Levinas’ phenomenology rediscovers the ethical dimension of sensibility, so that an ethical embodied subject is made possible. In particular, we will explore Levinas’ notion of sensibility. Interestingly, for Levinas, the subject’s sensibility per se is neither ethical nor non-ethical; rather the ethical potentiality of the subject’s sensibility is triggered only under certain intersubjective conditions. Levinas attempts to discover what intersubjective conditions can and cannot make sensibility ethical.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas discusses the ethical and unethical dimensions of sensibility. This prepares a solid ground for the discussion on ethical subjectivity developed in *Otherwise than Being*. Levinas argues that the primordial mode of the human existence is a sensible existence, which is an irreducible and pure form of life. Human beings are the sensitive beings who find themselves first immersed in a sensuous world without being totalized by any conceptualized representations. The sensibility does
not "belong to the order of thought but to that of sentiment."34

Human beings first sense and enjoy the world through their sensual body, not apprehend the world through their conscious mind. Sensibility does not constitute the world, whereas it "constitutes the very contentment of existence."35 Lingis says that for Levinas, sensibility is "sense-perception, apprehension of sense."36 In sensibility, "we find ourselves steeped in a depth before we confront surfaces and envision the profiles of objects. Sensibility opens us not upon empty space, but upon an extension without determinate frontiers, a plenum of free-floating qualities without substrates or enclosures, upon luminosity, elasticity, vibrancy, savor...we find ourselves in it, in light, in the elemental, buoyed up, sustained by it."37 For Levinas, sensibility is irrational or "essentially naïve,"38 and its irrational and naïve character can enable the subject to sense his or her existence without the support of reason.

The Western rational tradition, as was mentioned before, privileges intelligibility over sensibility, treating representation and intelligibility as a primordial way to perceive the world. In particular, Husserl privileges the primacy of the objectifying act that turns our sense of the world into theoretical thought so as to generate knowledge about the

34 Emmanuel Levinas, **Totality and Infinity**, p. 135.
35 Emmanuel Levinas, **Totality and Infinity**, p. 135.
37 Alphonso Lingis, **Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility**, p. 80.
world and the other. For Husserl, although sensibility can offer the subject some sensual elements to construct theoretical content, it does not have a self-sufficient character because sensibility per se is not intelligible. That is to say, sensibility cannot offer the content and idea that Husserl privileges. Levinas says that the problem of "Husserl's excessive attachment to theoretical thought" is that it reduces reality to thought and representation, thereby reducing the alterity of the world to the same. In other words, life is reduced to a thought or a rational form of life: "Intelligibility, the very occurrence of representation, is the possibility for the other to be determined by the same without determining the same, without introducing alterity into it; it is a free exercise of the same."41

According to Levinas, sensual enjoyment is a basic form of life that is prior to reason, representation and reflection: "What I live from is not in my life as the represented is within representation in the eternity of the same or in the unconditional present of cogitation;" rather, "To live is to play...simply play or enjoyment of life."43 Therefore, sensibility is described not "as a moment of representation, but as the instance

38 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 135.
40 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 127.
41 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 124.
42 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 128.
of enjoyment." In other words, sensibility is enjoyment.

Lingis clarifies Levinas' notion of sensibility and enjoyment: "The sensual sensibility is receptivity for this elemental materiality. Sensuality is not intentionality...

Steeped in the elemental, contented with the plenum, its movement is that of enjoyment...being sensual, one enjoys the light, the color, the solidity, the spring, the monsoon, and one enjoys one's enjoyment." For Levinas, "to sense is to be within, without the conditioned... Sensibility, essentially naïve, suffices to itself in a world insufficient for thought." That is to say, sensibility is self-sufficient and not pre-determined because it "establishes a relation with a pure quality without support, with the element." John Drabinski says that Levinas gives sensibility a transcendental role:

"The concretion of sensation opens upon a transcendental conception of sensibility, specified in the modalities of Desire and Enjoyment."

Levinas claims, however, that such a sensitive subject, who treats enjoyment as his or her basic mode of sensitive life, would become an egoist: "the movement to self in

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44 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 136.
45 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 136.
47 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 135.
48 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 136.
enjoyment and happiness marks the sufficiency of the I."50 In enjoyment, the sensitive subject will separate from the other, because "enjoyment is a withdrawal into oneself, an involution."51 Separation is "solitude" and enjoyment is "isolation."52 Such an egoist I is presence at home with itself. The basic mode of life for such a sensitive subject is to satisfy his or her sensual needs, such as hunger, thirst, or nakedness, and thereby it always turns him or her into a happy, safe but egoist subject. Happiness, as Levinas says, is "accomplishment: it exists in a soul satisfied and not in a soul that has extirpated its needs, a castrated soul."53 Thus, the personality of the person is the particularity of the happiness of enjoyment, and "one becomes a subject of being not by assuming being but in enjoying happiness."54 In brief, Levinas primarily views the subject as a sensitive subject who takes enjoyment and self-satisfaction as his or her basic form of life. Such a sensitive subject is not necessarily unethical at this stage, because he or she is not hostile to the other even though his or her egoist attitude might generate an unethical and indifferent attitude towards the other.

However, if both the sensitive subject and the rational subject are the egoist subject, why does Levinas privilege the former over the latter? At first glance, both the sensitive

50 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 143.
51 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 118.
52 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 117.
53 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 115.
54 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 119.
and rational subjects privilege the fulfillment of one’s desire. The rational subject fulfills his or her metaphysical desire by reducing the particularity of the other to ontology and knowledge; and the sensitive subject fulfills his or her bodily desire by caring for his or her enjoyment first, not the need of the other. Thus, if both the rational and sensitive subjects are egoist subjects, why does Levinas privilege the sensitive subject? Would the sensitive subject have a greater potentiality than the rational subject for being ethical?

In fact, for Levinas, sensibility is ambiguous because it has both self-directed and the other-directed tendencies. In other words, sensibility has two dimensions, which are the dimensions of interiority and exteriority. The former generates an egoist life, whereas the latter generates an ethical life. Lingis says two kinds of sensibility are mentioned in Totality and Infinity: “a sensibility for the elements and the things of the world, sensuality, which is appropriation and self-appropriation, and a sensibility for the face of another, which is expropriation”55 Thus, the sensitive subject, for Levinas, is an ambiguous subject because he or she has two tendencies: the tendency for self-fulfillment and the tendency for the other.

Sensitivity, for Levinas, is pre-reflective: it is “not predetermined as

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objectifications.

This immediate and pre-reflective nature of sensitivity can make the sensitive subject become ethical. Diane Perpich says, "...it is the ego's enjoyment that give[s] it the weight or 'substance' (though Levinas uses the latter term advisedly) that make[s] of it a genuinely independent being and that provide[s] it with an interior life. But at the same time, this interiority must not be so closed in upon itself as to make a relation with exteriority impossible. Somehow, in the midst of interior life, without destroying its reality and without stopping its movement, it must be possible for a 'shock' to register and for the ego thus to find itself exposed to an absolute exteriority." On the one hand, the sensuality of the sensitive subject can turn him or her into an interior egoist subject by directing the subject to care for his or her immediate bodily need; but on the other hand, the immediate and pre-reflective nature of the sensitivity can interrupt the interior and egoist life of the subject and arouse the ethical sense of the subject.

What can arouse the ethical sense of the subject? According to Levinas, sensing the other's suffering and pain can arouse the ethical sense of the subject. But how can the suffering of the other arouse the subject's ethical sense? What does the subject sense from the suffering of the other?

56 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 188.
In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas argues that the fragile and suffering face of the other serves as an "imperative face" to awaken the ethical sense of the sensitive subject. That is to say, the other's face is a "moral urge" that calls the subject to respond to his or her life. Interestingly, Levinas does not simply regard the other's face as a material face, even though it has a material dimension. Rather face has a "sensible appearance."58 The sensitive subject can sense the other's face, but he or she cannot conceptually grasp the face since the face is only a sensible expression, an epiphany.59 The face is neither the object of vision nor "a plastic form like a portrait"60 that can be grasped and named through system and language; rather it is a sensible appeal, demand and order: "The face is not of the order of the seen, it is not an object, but it is he whose appearing preserves an exteriority which is also an appeal or an imperative given to your responsibility: to encounter a face is straightaway to hear a demand and an order... One can say once more: the face, behind the countenance that it gives itself, is like a being's exposure unto death; the without-defense, the nudity and the misery of the other... The face offers itself to your compassion and to your obligation."61 Levinas does not regard the other as simply the subject's dialogue partner that Martin Buber suggests; rather, as Lingis says, what the

58 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 198.
59 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 197.
60 Jill Robbins, *Is it Righteous To Be?*, p. 166.
other signals to me in his or her word, face, and expression as not only indicative, 
informative, but also vocative and imperative.\textsuperscript{[62]} In other words, the face of the other does 
not simply tell the subject something about his or her life; rather the face per se is a 
"moral urge" that commands the subject to take on an ethical obligation for the other.

According to Levinas, the subject cannot treat the other as an object of knowledge.
The face of the other is infinitely transcendent and cannot be conceptually apprehended 
by the subject: "the relation between the Other and me, which dawns forth in his 
expression, issues neither in number nor in concept. The Other remains infinitely 
transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which epiphany is produced and which 
appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are 
inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence."\textsuperscript{[63]} Thus, the structure of 
comprehension or the "constative dimension of language\textsuperscript{[64]} cannot exhaust the meaning 
of the infinite relationship between subject and other: "the face is present in its refusal to 
be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed. It is neither 
seen nor touched--for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the 
alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content."\textsuperscript{[65]} In other words, the

\textsuperscript{[62]} Alphonso Lingis, \textit{Sensation: Intelligibility in Sensibility}, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{[63]} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{[64]} Diane Perpich, \textit{The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{[65]} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 194.
transcendent other is always beyond the subject, and it is never in the symmetrical I-thou relationship that Buber claims. Rather it is an asymmetrical relationship where every other to the subject is a singular other that cannot be replaced by another other. Here, the singularity of the other does not refer to a property or character of the other; rather, as Perpich says, "the singularity signified in transcendence is not something we encounter or discover in the other...[but] is produced or performed in an orientation toward the other."66 In other words, the singularity of the other is not about the essence of the other, but a specific orientation towards the other.

Although the relationship between subject and other is asymmetrical, this does not mean that the other does not approach the subject or detaches from the subject. Rather the other, as Levinas says, "breaks with the world that can be common to us,"67 "breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it,"68 "speaks to me"69 and "thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power excised, be it enjoyment or knowledge."70 In particular, the infinity of the face has an imperative force that resists and commands us: "you shall not commit murder."71 Levinas regards such imperative force as the "ethical

66 Diane Perpich, The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, p. 75.
67 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 194.
68 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 198.
69 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 198.
70 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 198.
71 Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity, p. 199.
resistance,” in which “the epiphany of the face brings forth the possibility of gauging the infinity of the temptation to murder, not only as a temptation to total destruction, but also as the purely ethical impossibility of this temptation and attempt.” Such a non-violent nature of the other’s face, which serves as an infinite and irresistible moral command urging the subject not to kill but to protect the other’s life, turns the self-centered subject into an other-centered ethical subject.

To summarize, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas shows us that the human being is basically a sensual subject, and sensual enjoyment is a basic form of life that is prior to reason, representation and reflection. Such a sensual life is a basic condition for the subject to become ethical, because the sensual mode of life can expose the subject’s life towards the fragile face of the other. However, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas does not precisely show how the other transforms the structure of the ethical subject. As is obvious, his focus is mainly on the other, not the subject. Not until *Otherwise than Being* does Levinas finally reveal the ethical structure of the embodied subject. In particular, he identifies the ethical embodied subject as a mourning subject who not only senses the other’s suffering but also risks his or her bodily life for the other.

2. *Levinas on Sensibility and the Ethical Embodied Subject in Otherwise than*
In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explores how the sensitive epiphany of the face of the other serves as an imperative power to divert the sensitive subject from an egoist subject to an ethical subject. He does not formulate a new ethical subject that can replace the egoist and rational subject. Instead, he simply explores how the other puts the subjective life into question in a sensitive world. However, in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas highlights the formulation of a new ethical subject. In particular, he describes how the other helps to reconstruct a new ethical subjectivity through questioning the self-identity of the egoist subjectivity. John Drabinski identifies the theoretical difference between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* as follows: “In *Totality and Infinity*, the excessive exteriority of the Other ruptures the constitutional confines of my own subjective life and the representational modality of my being-in-the-world that the idealist’s notion of subjectivity presupposes and assumes. The Other questions my powers. In *Otherwise than Being*, the radical absence of the original manifestation of the Other, and the centrality of that trace in the notion of identity, does not simply call my subjective life into question. Rather this absence calls the very notions of subjectivity and

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71 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 199.
self-identity themselves into question.  

In Totality and Infinity, Levinas emphasizes the infinite relationship between the subject and other, especially highlighting the transcendence of the other, rather than exploring how an intersubjective bodily relation generates a new ethical subject. While Levinas emphasizes the infinite distance between the subject and the other’s subversion of the egoist subject, he fails to show how such an infinite relation works and how it nurtures the subject’s life. Levinas simply shows how the other “destroys” the subject’s egoism. In other words, in Totality and Infinity, Levinas approaches the infinite relationship from the other’s side, not the subject’s side, so he fails to show how a dynamic intersubjective life can function constructively within an infinite relation.

In Otherwise than Being, however, Levinas approaches the theme of transcendence and infinity from the position of the subject, rather than from the position of the other. Peperzak says “Levinas has chosen another perspective in Otherwise than Being for his approach to transcendence and the infinite. In Totality and Infinity, the central place was taken by the Other and its visage; in Otherwise than Being, Levinas meditates on the ‘position’ and the meaning of the subject; of the self who meets the other... Whereas Totality and Infinity attempted, with Plato, to think beyond the totality of all beings and

74 John E. Drabinski, Sensibility and Singularity, p. 217.
closed with eschatological questions, Otherwise than Being goes back to a sort of (under)ground: it attempts to trace down the underlying ‘fundament’ and subject of the various relations that it describes.” In other words, in Otherwise than Being, Levinas attempts to explore how encounter with the other changes the subject’s self-identity. He argues that the ethical selfhood of the subject is always already subjected to the ethical demand of the other. In the following subsections, I will show how Otherwise than Being describes a dynamic ethical relationship that transforms the structure of the subject. I want to argue that, for Levinas, caring for the other and taking responsibility for the other are the sufficient condition in formulating the ethical subjectivity. Bodily sensation is an important condition in formulating such an embodied ethical relationship.

2.1 Proximity: Ethical Embodied Relation

In Otherwise than Being, Levinas employs the notion of proximity to describe an intersubjective ethical relation mediated by sensibility. Claire Elise Katz says, “unlike Totality and Infinity, which emphasized distance and height, Otherwise than Being emphasizes proximity.” For Levinas, proximity is an obsessive bodily relationship between subject and other, where the subject is captured and obsessed by the other:

75 Adriaan Peperzak, To the Other, p. 212.
"proximity is not a state, a repose, but, a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest... No site then, is ever sufficiently a proximity, like an embrace... Never close enough, proximity does not congeal into a structure ... and reverts into a simple relation. Proximity, as the ‘closer and closer,’ becomes the subject."  

Does Levinas want to eliminate the infinite distance between subject and other proposed in Totality and Infinity by using the notion of proximity? Here we need to clarify that “proximity is nothing to do with spatial contiguity,” as Edith Wyschogrod says. It is better to understand proximity as the immediacy of the relation, not a physical closeness. It refers to a “bodily relationship” or an “inter-corporeal relationship,” that is mediated by bodily affection and “bodily exposure to the other,” not by rational dialogue or deliberation. Levinas says, “The non-thematized proximity does not simply belong to the ‘horizon’ of the contact, as a potentiality of this experience. Sensibility—the proximity, immediacy, and restlessness which signify in it—is not constituted out of some apperception putting consciousness into relationship with a body. Incarnation is not a transcendental operation of a subject that is situated in the midst of the world it represents to itself; the sensible experience of the body is already and from the start incarnate. The

77 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 82.
79 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 49.
sensible—maternity, vulnerability, apprehension--binds the node of incarnation into a plot larger than the apperception of self. In this plot I am bound to others before tied to my body."\(^80\) In other words, proximity is a relationship with a singular other without any conceptual meditation that is united neither by the synthesis of consciousness nor by any universal knowledge.

Thus, we should not simply regard Levinas' notion of proximity, a sensual intersubjective relationship, as the dialogical relationship suggested by Buber, even though proximity has a linguistic or signifying dimension (to be discussed later). The subject and the other in proximity are primarily tied by the sensual touch, not by conceptual communication. Thus, Levinas' ethics is not simply a dialogical ethics, because the cognitive implication of dialogue cannot fully characterize the "bodily" and "sensual" nature of Levinas' proximity.

Levinas views proximity as an irreducible primordial relation between the subject and the other, in which the subject's life and moral consciousness are already obsessed and possessed by the other. That is to say, the subject cannot reject the "approach," "invasion" and "commandment" of the other. Levinas argues that the other's life is already incarnated in the subject's life, and the subject has to face or accept such an

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\(^80\) Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 76.
obsessive relation with the other unconditionally. Thus, the intersubjective relation in proximity is not a reciprocal relation, but a non-reciprocal relation. That is to say, it is not the reward, e.g., the other’s appreciation, but the pre-given ethical command of the other, that motivates the subject to respond to the need of the other. Nor should the subject ask for a reward after responding to the need of the other. For the subject does not share the privileged status that the other has: “The subject affected by the other cannot think that the affection is reciprocal, for he is still obsessed with the very obsession he could exercise over him that obsesses him. Not to turn into relations that reverse, irreversibility, is the universal subjectness of the subject.”

Of course, we should not say that the subject gets no “reward” or “bonus” in his or her care of the other, because caring for the other can make the subject become ethical. But if one wants to earn the other’s appreciation through caring for the other, one is still an egoist and simply views caring for the other as a self-rewarding benevolent act (to be appreciated by the other). This turns caring for the other into an “option” that the subject can freely choose, whereas caring for the other is not an “option,” for Levinas, but an “absolute command.”

Levinas employs the metaphor of maternity to illustrate the notion of proximity and

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81 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 84.
to characterize the ethical relation between subject and other, especially its affective
nature. “Maternity” can be understood in two ways. First, Levinas regards proximity as a
“relation of kinship outside of all biology,”82 where “I am bound to him, him who is,
however, the first one on the scene, not signaled, unparalleled.”83 Although maternity
always signifies an intimate relationship between mother and child, this does not mean
that Levinas’ ethics excludes the male role. Rather, he attempts to illustrate an inborn and
pre-given kinship relation that is already assigned to the subject: “Rather than a nature,
earlier than nature, immediacy is this vulnerability, this maternity, this pre-birth or
pre-nature in which the sensibility belongs.”84 In other words, the notion of maternity is
used to emphasize a “pre-birth” and pre-nature” primordial relationship between subject
and other.

Second, Levinas uses maternity to illustrate a merciful relationship between subject
and other, in which the subject is like a father or a mother, who not only loves his or her
child but also takes responsibility for his or her child: “In maternity what signifies is a
responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the
effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks.

82 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 87.
83 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 87.
84 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 75-6.
Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor. In other words, the subject not only takes care of the other but also faces the risk of being persecuted by the enemy or hurt by the other while protecting the life of the other. That is to say, responsibility for Levinas is associated as a risk-taking act. According to Katz, “In Levinas’s discussion, maternity does not function simply as a metaphor derived from the physical proximity between mother and child, although certainly he does not overlook the immediacy of the relationship. Levinas equates maternity with mercy (rachamim, derived from the Hebrew word for uterus, rekhem).

And mercy is the ethical response to the other.”

Levinas understands the subject-other’s relationship as an affective and merciful relationship, which differs from Sartre’s understanding of the human relationship. The latter simply treats the subject’s other as “hell.” In No Exit, Sartre argues that since the other always limits the freedom and autonomy of the subject, the other is “hell” to the subject. He also characterizes the subject and other’s relation as a relation in conflict; nothing can help overcome such an alienated human condition. Clearly, Levinas rejects Sartre’s pessimistic and negative view of human relationship, a view of intersubjective relationship.

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85 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 75.
86 Claire Elise Katz, Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine, p. 132.
relationship as governed by hatred, not by love and responsibility.87

Moreover, for Levinas, since the subject’s body in proximity is passively animated and elected by the other, this makes Levinas’ body differ from the body of Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian Meditation and the body of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception. While Levinas shares Husserl’s pre-reflective embodied life and Merleau-Ponty’s historicity of the body, he gives priority to an absolute passivity of the subject’s body that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty fail to offer. For Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, embodiment is either a psycho-physical unity (Husserl) or the coincidence of the sensing and the sensed (Merleau-Ponty). Both privilege the activity of the subject’s body over the passivity of the subject’s body; both assert that one can unite one’s body with the outside world in an instinctive intentionality. That is to say, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty privilege the epistemological dimension of the body over its ethical dimension.

But Levinas does not view the subject’s body in such an “active” manner. He never privileges the epistemological dimension of the body; rather he views the subject’s body as passively exposed to the other and as unconditionally sacrificed for the other. Thereby the subject’s body is an ethical body. As Drabinski says, “Both Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptions of the body entail genetic projects that either give a

87 Having said that, Sartre modifies his negative position towards the other in Existentialism and
privilege to activity—the former—or intermingle activity and passivity—the latter. For
Levinas, the exposed body of ethical subjectivity is animated as a for-the-other. It is
animated to the point of obsession by the Other through the relation of passivity. There is
not a psyche that inhabits the body prior to awakening by the Other. Nor is there a
reciprocal or reversible character to our embodied presence to the Other. The body
exposed to the Other is animated and awakened otherwise.88 For Levinas, the passive
exposure of the subject’s body is “unique in the unexceptional requisition of
responsibility.”89 Of course, this does not mean that Levinas completely rejects
intentionality. As Wyschogrod argues, proximity still has an intentional character, but it is
a “new ethical intentionality”90 that does not relate the subject to the other by conceptual
synthesis, but by bodily sensation.

Thus, Levinas’ “passive body” can offer the more solid ethical ground for the
subject that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’s “active body” fails to offer. Like Husserl and
Merleau-Ponty, Levinas continues a phenomenological path that fully affirms one’s
bodily experience as a primordial mode of human life. But what makes Levinas’
approach distinctive is his discovery of the ethical dimension of the body in which one’s

88 John E. Drabinski, Sensibility and Singularity, pp. 207-08.
89 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 53.
90 Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas, p. 149.
ethical act is triggered by one’s bodily exposure towards the other.

Yet the subject rarely recognizes such a pre-given possessive relationship with the other. Levinas says that “the neighbor concerns me before all assumption, all commitment consented to or refused. I am bound to him, him who is, however, the first one on the scene, not signaled, unparalleled; I am bound to him before any liaison contracted. He orders me before being recognized.”91 How does the subject recognize such an incarnated and obsessive relation with the other? How does the other order the subject before being recognized by the subject?

While Levinas views the other as the transcendent other, who cannot be grasped conceptually by the subject, this does not mean that the subject cannot “sense” or “recognize” the “existence” and “approach” of the other. It is tempting, however, to think that Levinas’ ethics generates a complete split between the infinity of the other and the finitude of the subject that negates any sensual contact between subject and other. That is to say, the subject cannot sense or touch the other, such as the face of the other, since the transcendent other has an incomprehensible character. For instance, David Couzens Hoy says that, for Levinas, the face is not the physical countenance: it refuses to be contained and is neither seen nor touched. He concludes that Levinas privileges language over

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91 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 87.
sensation in theorizing the face. The problem with Hoy’s interpretation is his ignoring the sensual nature of Levinas’ proximity, in which the bodily sensation is viewed as a “way” or “condition” for the subject to “recognize” the “existence” of the other. Levinas says, “...sensibility must be interpreted as touch first of all... In reality, the caress of the sensible awakens in a contact and tenderness, that is, proximity, awakens in the touched only starting with the human skin, a face, only with the approach of a neighbor.” In other words, although the transcendent character of the face of the other cannot be grasped conceptually, this does not mean that the face is totally “untouchable.” While Levinas refuses to turn the face of the other into a “concept” or “knowledge,” he does not negate sensual contact between the subject and the other.

In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas argues that bodily sensibility not only mediates the subject and the other but also makes the subject aware of a pre-given intimate relation with the other. In particular, the other’s pain and suffering can penetrate the subject’s heart and sensation and arouse the subject’s ethical sense: “Pain penetrates into the very heart of the for-oneself that beats in enjoyment, in the life that is complacent in itself, that lives of its life. To give, to-be-for-another, despite oneself, but in interrupting the

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for oneself, is to take bread out of one’s own mouth, to nourish the hunger of another
with one’s own fasting.”⁹⁴ Thus, the Levinasian ethical subject is an embodied subject:
one’s ethical identity is transformed and one’s ethical sense is awakened when the other’s
bodily suffering and pain overwhelms one’s body. Here, Levinas continues the analysis of
the ethical dimension of sensuality in *Totality and Infinity*. He shows how the sensuality
of pain and suffering serves as an important “medium” to transform the egoist subject,
who lives for self-enjoyment, into an ethical subject, who lives for the other. In particular,
Levinas highlights the “ethical function” of pain, which is to subvert the subject’s egoist
mentality.

As Wyschogrod rightly says, for Levinas, the sensible is not known; it is
approached.⁹⁵ It is the sensation, not consciousness, that approaches the subject and
awakens the subject’s ethical sense towards the other. That is to say, the affective
sensation, not rational intentionality, serves as a mode to mediate the subject and the other.
The problem of synthesis is that it privileges the “sameness” and “oneness” between
subject and other over the “difference” between subject and other. This negates the
alterity and infinity of the other because synthesis reduces the multiplicity of human
beings to oneness so as to acquire an ontological understanding of human beings. In

⁹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 56.
particular, the consciousness of synthesis only allows the subject to conceptualize the other, not sense the other. This not only represses and negates different kinds of sensual communication between the subject and the other but also prevents the subject from being interrupted by the other’s pain.

Although the other, for Levinas, is transcendent, this does not mean that the other does not leave any “footprints” or “hints” for the subject to recognize the other’s existence. Levinas argues that the other has left a “trace” for the subject so as to “arouse” the subject’s ethical responsibility. But what is the trace of the other? In an earlier essay, titled “The Trace of the Other,” Levinas gives the meaning of trace a biblical implication with reference to Exodus, chapter 33: “And the Lord said: ‘Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.” Then Levinas says, “The revealed God of our Judeo-Christian spirituality maintains all the infinity of his absence…. He shows himself only by his trace.” Here Levinas attempts to define trace as an ambiguous contact between infinity and finite. We can discover only

95 Edith Wyschogrod, Emmanuel Levinas, p. 150.
the trace of God, not the face of God. Within a finite time, we can discover the trace of infinity, but we never grasp the infinite God conceptually ("you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen"). God's trace is ambiguous because it discloses both the absence and presence of the transcendent God.

For Levinas, the trace of the other is ambiguous, like God's trace. The trace is a special kind of sign left by the other to the subject from the past. It is a specific modality of signification that cannot be reduced to the present and presence. It articulates the very inordinateness of infinity. Levinas regards the trace as the "weak sense" of the face, which escapes any representations: "It [the face of the other] escapes representation; it is the very collapse of phenomenality. Not because it is too brutal to appear, but because in a sense too weak, non-phenomenon because less than a phenomenon. The disclosing of a face is nudity, non-form, abandon of self, ageing, dying, more naked than nudity. It is poverty, skin with wrinkles, which are a trace of itself." Due to the transcendent nature of the face, the trace cannot represent, but only signifies or signals the weakness and vulnerability of the face of the other.

In other words, the subject cannot comprehend the face of the other by simply interpreting the traces left by the other, because the trace, as Levinas says, is "not its signs

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97 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 94.
that would await an ontological interpretation, nor some knowing that would be added to
its ‘essence.’ ... [I]t is the infinition or glory of the infinite.”99 The transcendent other
leaves the trace, whereas the trace is only a trace of infinity, not infinity per se. That is to
say, the trace never allows us to fully represent the ultimate picture of the other. Thus, the
trace is against ontology, escaping the capture of any ontological discourses. The trace
only hints to the subject how to trace the other. Peperzak says: “The trace can be seen as a
specific kind of sign, insofar as a detective, a hunter, or a historian examine it for clues to
the reconstruction of the activities and the character of those who left it behind. They did
not intend to leave traces; they even tried to wipe them out, but in effacing them, they left
other traces. A trace signals a certain past but contains no presence: the past it indicates is
absolutely gone. The possibility of the trace and its specific form of signaling is based on
the fact that it functions in a ‘world’... The sign is left as the trace of those who
communicated it; it traces the speaker’s or writer’s passing by.”100 Jill Robbins regards
the trace as “residual phenomena,” which “is a mark in the world, the effect of a cause in
the same world...[and] accessible to an interpreter who would decode them.”101

According to Levinas, the other leaves the trace. Through the trace, the other does
not simply want to show the subject the "mark" of his or her existence; rather the trace of
the other signifies an infinite responsibility and order: "A face does not function in
proximity as a sign of a hidden God who would impose the neighbor on me. It is a trace
of itself, a trace in the trace of an abandon... It obsesses the subject without staying in
correlation with him, without equalling me in a consciousness, ordering me before
appearing, in the glorious increase of obligation."102 In other words, the other's trace not
only tells the subject that the other has lived in the world but also serves as an ethical
command for the subject. And such an ethical command not only "disrupts" the comfort
and the very subjectivity of the subject and the order of the world but also "orders" the
subject to be an ethical subject, and does so with an obsessive gesture, to the extent that
the subject cannot reject the other's order.

The other's trace also invites the subject to join a risky journey with him or her.
Levinas says that the trace is "an invitation to the fine risk of approach qua approach, to
the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of
exposure, saying"103 in which the subject becomes ethical while exposing his or her life
to the other. The journey is risky because it demands the subject to expose his or her

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102 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 94.
103 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 94.
bodily life to the other unconditionally. Exposure of one's life to the other might cost one's life. Such a risky journey is also a challenging journey because it challenges the egoist subject to be obedient to the other. Peperzak asserts that "Transcendence touches us by leaving traces which challenge and resist our comprehension. The obscure and enigmatic character does not diminish the overwhelming certainty of their practical relevance, however: the Infinite ‘speaks’ by creating subjects as already obedient delivered over to the infinite demands of responsibility."\(^{104}\) It is tough for the egoist subject, a rational and calculative subject, because the trace resists the subject’s comprehension and calculation before exposing his or her life to the other.

Since the ethical command of the other “disrupts” the subject in an “arbitrary” or “unexpected” way through the trace, this does not allow the subject to calculate the cost or consequence before responding to the other. In other words, the other’s ethical command is irresistible for the subject; the subject needs to respond to the command of the other involuntarily and passively. Levinas says, “The neighbor assigns me before I designate him. This is a modality not of knowing, but of an obsession, a shuddering of the human quite different from cognition…. In an approach I am first a servant of a neighbor, already late and guilty for being late. I am as it were ordered from the outside,

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traumatically commanded, without interiorizing by representation and concepts the authority that commands me.\textsuperscript{105} To a certain extent, we may view ethical responsibility as an "assignment" that is already prepared for the subject by the other ("the neighbor assigns me before I designate him"). For the other, the subject’s response is always late and the subject is guilty for being late. Thus, the subject’s response is “never enough” for the other. The other, not the subject, is the “final judge” who judges the righteousness of subject and justifies the subject’s ethical act. Thus, Levinas' ethical subject is not a self-righteous subject because his or her righteousness is justified by the other, and not by the subject per se.

Thus, the face of the other has both finite and transcendent characters. On one hand, the other’s suffering context is concrete, not abstract, the concrete suffering of a person; on the other hand, the ethical command generated from the other’s suffering or revealed from the other’s face is infinite so that the subject never “fulfills” the other’s ethical demand. As Perpich rightly states: the face of the other “is both finitude and transcendence. On one side, the face is body, morality, hunger, destitution, and nudity, and on the other, infinity, height, and command.”\textsuperscript{106} For Levinas, only such a contradictory nature of the other’s face that contains both the representable/the visible

\textsuperscript{105} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 87.
and unrepresentable/invisible nature can reveal the infinite and bodily nature of ethics.

Perpich explains:

"Suspended between the visible and the invisible, the immanent and the transcendent par excellence, the figure of the face is not a thesis about ethics but is the performance of ethical life. The tension between what this figure does (when it represents the other) and what it says (that the other is unrepresentable) is the enactment of our original ethical situation... Ethics is a matter not of having a secure principle, but of realizing that the principle is never secure enough. It is a matter of being overwhelmed by the infinity of the demand, the ever renewed demand of preserving ethical practices of reason-giving--and reason-giving that must meet not some abstract theoretical conditions, but that must respond to the hungry face, the embodied self, that here and now demands my aid."\(^{107}\)

In other words, although the face of the other has a transcendent character, this does not mean that the subject cannot approach the other. If it did mean this, the other would never be helped by the subject; the subject’s egoist mentality would never be interrupted by the

\(^{106}\) Diane Perpich, *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*, p. 68.
other; and the subject’s ethical being would never be actualized by the other. Thus, for Levinas, what cannot be represented or exhausted by concept is the subject’s ethical relation to the other in proximity, not the suffering situation of the other.

Thus, for Levinas, any ethical responsibility that stems from deliberation or reasoning is not “ethical enough” because ethics and responsibility are about a self-sacrifice or a self-exposure to the other. Caring for the other is a “fine risk,” not a “calculative act.” Claire Elise Katz asserts: “His [Levinas’] conception of responsibility, described in Otherwise than Being, moves further away from a conventional understanding of responsibility. Responsibility is response to the other... To respond to the other is to be vulnerable to the other; it is not to know what might happen in that response.”

Thus, Levinas’ notion of responsibility differs from the traditional notion of ethics. For the latter, since responsibility stems from the will and reason of the subject, the ethical subject does not need to take risks. The subject has eliminated all the “risky factors” before taking any ethical responses. Such a calculative ethics turns ethics into a disembodied rational judgment. James Olthuis rightly says, “modern ethical theory in the spirit of the Enlightenment has striven to construct a rational foundation of morality.... Inspired by the scientific ideal of objectivity, ethical theory attempted to secure so-called

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107 Diane Perpich, The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, p. 77.
objective moral judgments free from the subjective desires, beliefs, and narratives of the
agents who make them.... Moreover, the transcendental turn to the subject, especially in
Descartes, Kant, and Husserl, led to an emphasis on a timeless, omniscient, disinterested
observer and the loss of attention to the pain and suffering of bodies.109 Levinas does
not treat the conceptual foundation as the ground of ethics; rather he treats an
intersubjective relationship as the ground of ethics.

According to Levinas, if one’s ethical responsibility were primarily determined by
consciousness or intentionality, it would involve an egoist ethics, since it stems from the
calculation of cost and consequence,110 not from the other’s ethical demand. This would
privilege the subject’s interest over the other’s interest. For instance, some applied ethics,
which simply treats responsibility as decision-making, has reduced ethics to
cost-calculation and turned the ethical subject into a self-centered subject. Of course, this
does not mean that we should not apply Levinas’ ethics in our daily life.111 But I want to
emphasize that Levinas does not view ethics as a rational deliberation that can help

109 James H. Olthuis, “Face to Face: Ethical Asymmetry or the Symmetry of Mutuality?” in James H.
Olthuis (ed.), Knowing Other-Wise: Philosophy at the Threshold of Spirituality (New York: Fordham
110 I agree with Lambert Zuidervaart’s comment that Kant’s deontological ethics is not consequentialist
and explicitly opposes consequentialism. Thus, although Kant ethics is a modern ethical theory, it is not
the egoist ethics that Levinas criticizes.
111 For instance, Sharon Todd attempts to apply Levinas’ ethics in social justice education. See Sharon
Todd, Learning from the Other: Levinas, Psychoanalysis, and Ethical Possibilities in Education
people make “correct” and “safe” ethical decisions so as to eliminate any risky factors or costly consequences. Instead, he wants to reveal the most fundamental form of ethical life, which rests on the self-sacrifice of subject. Accordingly, ethical responsibility is mediated by bodily suffering, not by rational deliberation. As Katz rightly says, “the proximity that Levinas emphasizes indicates how my responsibility for the other is not meditated by choice or cognition.”\footnote{Claire Elise Katz, \textit{Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine}, p. 130.} What matters for Levinas is the meaning of being ethical and the condition of being ethical, not “what actions we should perform, what rules should govern our conduct, what end states we should pursue, what virtues we should cultivate and how we can justify claims about all of these matters.”\footnote{Edith Wyschogrod and Gerald P. McKenny, “Introduction,” in Edith Wyschogrod and Gerald P. McKenny (eds.), \textit{The Ethical} (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 1.}

It is also incorrect to view Levinas’ ethics as a virtue ethics, as some thinkers argue. Although Levinas’ ethics includes virtuous elements such as responsibility, sacrifice, courage or love, we cannot simply regard Levinas’ ethics as virtue ethics, because Levinas does not view cultivation and practice as the sufficient way to become virtuous that some virtue ethicists, such as Aristotle, suggest. For Levinas, the subject’s ethical character or identity is formed by the interruption by the fragile face of the other, not by practices, education or cultivation. Unlike Levinas’ ethics, virtue ethics rests on the
subject's will and concern to decide what moral character to cultivate and practice, which means that the subject can actively and freely determine the content of his or her ethical identity. For Levinas, however, the subject cannot actively and freely form his or her ethical identity. It is the other who primary interrupts the subject's egoist life and urges the subject to give up his or her life, thereby forming the subject's ethical identity. Simply put, the subject cannot determine the content of his or her ethical identity. The subject is completely passive in the formation of ethical identity and character.

Therefore, Levinas refuses to regard the ethical subject as "committed subjectivity":

"Commitment already presupposes a theoretical consciousness, as a possibility to assume, before or after the event, a taking up that goes beyond the susceptiveness of passivity."114

Rather Levinas's subject "is a denuding, an exposure to being affected, a pure susceptiveness. It does not posit itself, possessing itself...; it is consumed and delivered over, dis-locates itself, loses its place, is exiled, relegates itself into itself...exposed to wounds and outrage, emptying itself in a no-grounds, to the point of substituting itself for the other, holding on to itself only as it were in the trace of its exile.... It is not commitment that describes signification; it is signification, the-one-for-the-other

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114 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 136.
characteristic of proximity, which justifies all commitment.\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 138} Levinas asserts that if one’s will and freedom initiate one’s ethical acts without the participation of the other, this can generate egoism and self-righteousness. It is an egoist claim if one says one can commit to the other by oneself, since the motivation of commitment never stems from the subject’s will, but from the other’s interruption. Levinas employs “maternity” to illustrate a pre-given subject-other relationship (proximity), mediated by love and passion, as a mother embraces her baby with her body. That is to say, this is not simply an issue of commitment; rather this is an issue of responsibility. Of course, this does not mean that a mother should not commit to her child; but for Levinas, it is the pre-original responsibility embedded in proximity, not a theoretical form of commitment, that sustains the subject’s commitment.

Certainly, for Levinas, the other or the neighbor is the subject’s “imperative force.”\footnote{Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 138} But this is not the Kantian categorical imperative. For Kant, the moral imperative is a universal principle or law, whereas the moral imperative, for Levinas, is the face of the other: “The way of the neighbor is a face. The face of a neighbor signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract…. The disclosing of a face is nudity, non-form, abandon of self, ageing, dying,
The main difference between Kant and Levinas is that the former regards the universal moral law as an ethical source to motivate the ethical subject to take responsibility for the other, whereas the latter treats the particular face of the other as an ethical force to arouse the ethical sense of the subject. Catherine Chalier rightly adds that Kant establishes his groundwork with the idea of a principle, and its condition with the idea of a good will; conversely, Levinas asserts that “the ethical dimension of the subject reveals itself only on the condition that one starts from the infinite and from what is required by the particular presence of the other person standing before the subject.”

While Kant gives primacy to autonomy, Levinas regards heteronomy as the basis of the ethical act. For Kant, the subject is moral and free by reason of its autonomy to the extent that the subject can discover the universality of the law as a “fact of reason.” According to Levinas, the subject cannot become ethical through obeying the rule of universal moral law; rather it is the infinite other who makes him or her be ethical. As Chalier says, “Levinas’s reflection, unlike Kant’s, is moored not in the concern to

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116 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 93.
117 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 88.
119 Simon Critchley says that both Kant and Levinas can have some agreements in two areas. First, Levinas would agree with Kant’s second formulation of the categorical imperative, namely respect for persons, where the subject should not treat the other person as a means to an end. Second, Kant’s understanding of the incomprehensibility of the moral law discussed in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* is similar to Levinas’ incomprehensibility of the other. See Simon Critchley, “Introduction,” in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 12.
preserve an abstract and formal universality—the idea of humanity linked to moral autonomy—but rather in the concern to watch over concrete singularities. Levinas shows how, thanks to the heteronomy characteristic of the encounter with the foreign and vulnerable face, another idea of universality is brought to mind. That universality does not depend on principles...but rather on the responses given here and now, before it is too late, to the uniqueness of faces."120 To a certain extent, Levinas does not reject the idea of universality, provided that it is not an abstract law, but the singularity and concreteness of the fragile face of other. What he rejects is the abstractness of universality such as law and rational principle, not the concreteness of universality such as the other. The problem of the former is its disembodied character, which not only reduces the embodied subject to an abstract disembodied system but also domesticates the difference and singularity of the subject.

We should not say that Levinas completely rejects Kant, especially Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, in which the subject is called to respect the other. In an interview, Levinas affirms the importance of Kant's ethics: "I like the second formulation of the categorical imperative, the one that tells [me] to respect man in myself when I respect the other. In this expression, we are not in pure universality, but already in

the presence of the other. You know, the rights of man are nothing new; we already find
their traces in Cicero. Much more important to me is that the rights of the other come
before my own. That is much more important. We must understand that the rights of the
other do not only begin with the defense of my own rights."[121] The difference between
Kant and Levinas is that the latter believes the right of the other comes before the subject.
That is to say, the right of the other is neither given by the subject nor formulated by the
universal moral law; rather it precedes the right of the subject. The other first commands
the subject to respect his or her right, such that the subject does not grant the right of the
other. It is the priority of the right of the other that makes Levinas’ ethics differ from
Kant’s ethics.

In *Otherwise than Being*, then, Levinas uses “proximity” to describe how bodily
sensation generates a pre-given obsessive bodily relationship between subject and other,
where the subject is totally captured and obsessed by the other. In proximity, the other’s
overwhelming pain and suffering penetrate the subject’s heart and arouse the subject’s
ethical sense, in that the subject is commanded to expose his or her bodily life for the
other unconditionally. The other overcomes one’s egoism and transforms one’s ethical
life and subjectivity. In other words, for Levinas, one cannot become ethical in oneself;

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rather it is the intervention of the other that makes one ethical. Thus, for Levinas, the ethical subject is never an autonomous and rational subject, but a passive and sensual subject; ethics is no longer a safe rational deliberation, but a risky bodily exposure that costs the subject's life.

2.2. Saying, Bodily Communication and Life Exposure

Although the other, for Levinas, is the transcendent other who cannot be conceptually grasped by the subject, this does not mean that the other would not "communicate" or "interact" with the subject in proximity. As was mentioned before, the transcendent other does not leave the subject "alone"; rather the other commands the subject to take responsibility for him or her. The other can command the subject: "you shall not kill."

That is to say, the subject-other relationship, for Levinas, is an ethical communicative relationship, which helps signify the other's ethical command and the subject's ethical response.

Yet Levinas rejects any purely rational communication or dialogue between the subject and the other since he refuses to regard rationality as the only valid criterion to qualify an ideal communication. In particular, rational communication aims at "knowing," which, Levinas thinks, destroys the immediacy of the sensible. Since

knowing is “conceptual” and “a priori,” “incapable of opening intuitively upon the things themselves,” regarding communication as simply understanding or knowing can negate “the immediacy of the sensible.”\textsuperscript{122} This fails to generate an embodied ethic that rests on the immediacy of the sensuous touch.

For Levinas, sensibility is a “non-representational sensation”\textsuperscript{123} that “contains” all the affective sensations before being conceptualized and domesticated by the consciousness. He says, “the immediacy on the surface of the skin characteristic of sensibility” can become “the exposure to wounding and to enjoyment, an exposure to wounding in enjoyment, which enables the wound to reach the subjectivity of the subject complacent in itself and positing itself for itself.”\textsuperscript{124} The other’s ethical command, which stems from bodily exposure, is irresistible to the subject, because the immediacy of sensibility always interrupts the subject before being conceptualized by the subject’s consciousness. The subject can “feel” or “sense” what the other “feels” or “senses” immediately, such that the subject cannot reject the other’s call for help (the ethical command). Since the other’s suffering is an overwhelming sensation, it totally tears the subject from his or her egoist world. In other words, it is bodily sensibility per se that

\textsuperscript{122} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{123} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{124} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 64.
makes possible the “interruption” of the other towards the subject. Reasserting the
non-representative nature of the sensibility is important for Levinas because it offers a
ground of contact for the finite subject and the infinite other.

Thus far, it seems that Levinas views the intercorporeal communication between
subject and other as only a sensual or “fleshly” interaction without a cognitive dimension.
But the non-representative nature of the intercorporeal communication does have a
cognitive dimension. First, the other’s trace can signify, thus it can awaken the subject’s
ethical sense. The sign of the trace can signal the trace of the other, even though the
subject cannot conceptually grasp the infinity of the other.

Second, Levinas’ body is a sign that can signify the need of other and the response
of subject. Robert Gibbs says that, for Levinas, “there is no ethics without bodies that
know hunger, that need food, shelter, comfort. The giving of oneself, therefore, that
characterizes the risk in communication requires a material body that can suffer in the
giving.”¹²⁵ If the other’s contact with the subject were simply a sensual contact that
cannot generate any concrete ethical meanings or contents, then the ethical command
would not be powerful because it is not indicative. But what makes the ethical command
indicative? For Levinas, it is a suffering and wounded body, which can show the concrete

meaning and content of hunger, suffering and comfort, indicating the subject is to take
action to help the other. Although proximity is a pre-given ethical relationship, this does
not mean that its ethical meaning is self-evident. That is to say, the other uses his or her
body to show his or her suffering status to the subject; and the subject uses his or her
body to perform the ethical meaning of responsibility. Thus, the other’s need and the
subject’s response have to be signified through the body. The body, to a certain extent, is
an “ethical medium.”

In Otherwise than Being, Levinas interprets subjectivity and sensibility as modes of
signifying, in which the body is a sign to indicate my relation to another person. Gibbs
says that “this requires an interpretation of corporeality that focuses on how the body
itself is first not for itself but for the other person. To ‘have’ a human body, according to
Levinas, is to be for other people’s bodily needs. Nurturing, sheltering, nursing, even
bearing a child all define the self’s ‘being in’ a body.”\textsuperscript{126} That is to say, the subject’s
ethical act per se is also a signifying process. The exposure of the subject’s body to the
other is not only a sensual contact but also a cognitive contact. In proximity, the other not
only “feels” or “senses” the care and the help of the subject, but also “knows” that the
subject’s bodily life is open to him or her. The other can decode an ethical meaning

\textsuperscript{126} 2000) pp. 52-3.
generated from the subject’s self-sacrificial act. In other words, what the other receives from the subject in proximity is not only an “affective feeling” but also an “ethical meaning.”

While Levinas asserts the importance of linguistic communication between the subject and the other, how can he insure that the linguistic system does not domesticate the immediacy of bodily sensibility? If the body per se is a signifying body, then what does it signify? To answer these questions, we need to explore Levinas’ notion of the saying and the said.

For Levinas, language has two dimensions: saying and said. Levinas says, “saying no doubt precedes the language that communicates propositions and messages: it is a sign given from one to another by proximity about proximity.... A sign is given from one to the other before the constitution of any system of signs, any common place formed by culture and sites, a sign given from null site to null site. The fact that a sign, exterior to the system of evidences, comes into proximity while remaining transcendent, is the very essence of language prior to every particular language.”127 According to Levinas, saying refers to the act of speaking128 that precedes a propositional language and gives signs a

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definite and concrete meaning. Thus, saying is exterior to the linguistic system and remains transcendent.

Since human beings need language to construct the identity of entities in world, the saying is teleologically turned to the kerugma of the said or the content. The said is not the origin of saying; if it were, the saying would become the graspable present that Levinas wants to reject. For the said is identified with “the linguistic system” and “ontology” which is “the price that manifestation demands.” In particular, “essence fills the said,” which means that the said, as Peperzak states, “encompasses all discourses or narratives in which beings are identified and essence verbalized.”

According to Levinas, since saying “opens me to the other before saying what is said,” it is not simply an “idle talk” or dialogue. Instead, it is a risk-taking communication because the subject needs to expose his or her life before the other. Saying is “in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability.” Thus, saying is not an exchange of information, but a “naked life exposure.” Saying approaches the other by

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129 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 37.
133 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 9.
134 Adriaan Peperzak, *Beyond*, p. 60.
136 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 48.
breaking through the noema involved in intentionality, turning inside out. The subject in
the saying approaches a neighbor in expressing itself, in being expelled.\textsuperscript{137} Saying "is the
very \textit{respiration} of this skin prior to any intention. The subject is not \textit{in itself}, at home
with itself, such that it would dissimulate itself in itself or dissimulate itself in its wound
and its exile, understood as \textit{acts} of wounding or exiling itself.... The subject of saying
does not give signs, it becomes a sign, turns into an allegiance."\textsuperscript{138} In other words, the
subject in the saying or the subject’s body becomes a sign. The subject does not need any
external linguistic systems to express his or her ethical concern towards the other; rather
his or her bodily exposure to the other itself is the sign itself. As Gibbs rightly says, “It is
not despite the materiality of my body that I signify and use signs, but because of it. I am
not the referent of a term in a linguistic system, not a topic to be talked about. Instead, I
am a sign, vulnerable in my body.”\textsuperscript{139}

In saying, the subject has to take a risk to share his or her wounded bodily
experience with the other. Since the subject is exposed to the other, the saying uncovers
the subject who speaks. The speaking subject discloses him/herself by neglecting his or
her defenses, leaving a shelter, exposing himself or herself to outrage, to insults and

\textsuperscript{137} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{138} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{139} Robert Gibbs, \textit{Why Ethics}, p. 52.
wounding. Thus, for Levinas, the subjectivity of a subject in the saying is vulnerability, "exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity, an irrecuperable time, an unassemblable diachrony of patience, an exposedness always to be exposed the more, an exposure to expressing, and thus to saying, thus to giving." Here, Levinas shows us that a truly ethical communication is not a rational communication, but a self-disclosure of the subject towards the other. It is also not a "truth-speaking" discursive act, in which the subject simply speaks unreservedly to the others in order to show his or her truthfulness or faithfulness. Rather, what the subject discloses to the other in saying is the vulnerability, fear, suffering, and painfulness of his or her bodily life, which no concept or system can grasp.

Thus, bodily communication in proximity, as Levinas says, only signifies a "witness" and "testimony" of the subject, in which the responsibility of the subject towards the other is revealed. Simply speaking, "saying is witness."

"Saying, before setting forth a said, is already the testimony of this responsibility--and even the saying of a said, as an approach to the other, is a responsibility for him.... A pure

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140 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 50.
142 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 150.
testimony, it is a martyr’s truth which does not depend on any disclosure or any
‘religious’ experience; it is an obedience that precedes the hearing of any order. A pure
testimony, it does not testify to a prior experience, but to the infinite which is not
accessible to the unity of apperception, non-appearing and disproportionate to the
present…. The infinite is not ‘in front of’ me; I express it, but precisely by giving a sign
of the giving of signs, of the ‘for the other’ in which I am dis-interested: here I am [me
voici]! The accusative [me voici!] here is remarkable: here I am, under your eyes, at your
service, your obedient servant.”

Saying is a “fleshy testimony” or “embodied witness” that testifies to the infinite
responsibility and obedience of the subject. Although the witness can signify, it cannot be
manipulated or exhausted by any cognitive concepts, for it is about one’s self-sacrificing
obedience, “a martyr’s truth,” which Levinas thinks, is prior to any concepts and orders.
That is to say, life testimony per se, not any external linguistic systems or grammars,
serves as the reference of saying. Testimony differs from story-telling because the latter
needs a narrative framework to re-construct one’s experience; but testimony occurs only
when one sacrifices one’s life toward the other. Thus, it is life-exposure, not any

conceptual framework, that serves as the ultimate reference of saying. Testimony has a propositional dimension, but it cannot simply be reduced to a propositional discourse. It is embodied life, not concept or word, that determines the content of testimony. Simply put, the testimony is an “embodied ethical discourse.” Thus, proximity, which is mediated by the saying, an infinite witness, can maintain its cognitive function without being manipulated by the cognitive sign.

Moreover, the witness, for Levinas, is a trace that cannot be effaced by the said. Although the exposure of the body does signify, it does not say a word. It only leaves a trace through which the glory of the witness is signified: “This witness is not reducible to the relationship that leads from an index to the indicated. That would make it a disclosure and a thematization. It is the bottomless passivity of responsibility, and thus, sincerity. It is the meaning of language, before language scatters into words, into themes equal to the words and dissimulating in the said the openness of the saying exposed like a bleeding wound. But the trace of the witness given, the sincerity or glory, is not effaced even in its said.”144 While the bodily witness is a language, it is not a conceptual language structured by grammar or system (the said). The meaning of bodily witness can be grasped metaphorically but it cannot be exhausted by a concept. For instance, Levinas

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144 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 151.
regards the witness as a "bleeding wound." Such a metaphor simply characterizes the vulnerable nature of witness, however. We should not simply identify "the witness" as "bleeding wound." Thus, the witness is only a trace of witness. In other words, although inter-corporeal communication has a cognitive dimension, its cognitive nature can never dominate the flow or circulation of the sensation between the subject and the other because the sign of trace in the saying only signifies, does not rationalize. It signifies what cannot be conceptualized, namely, the witness of the subject.

According to Levinas, however, culture always turns the saying into ontological discourse, into the said. Indeed, Levinas does not completely reject ontological discourse; he only rejects the domination and absolutization of the ontological discourse. Peperzak says, "Levinas explicitly recognizes the positive and necessary aspects of the practical and theoretical totalizations produced by all people in every civilization. More than once he insisted that a systematic totality is indispensable for human practice and theory; what he fights against is not totality as such, but rather its absolutization: totality cannot be the ultimate."¹⁴⁵

To fight against the said, a systematic totality, one needs to reduce the said to the saying. Levinas says that we should disturb the said through the saying in order to turn

¹⁴⁵ Adriaan Peperzak, Beyond, p. 11.
any inter-subjective communication into an ethical communication: "it is the ethical interruption of essence that energizes the reduction.... To enter into being and truth is to enter into the said; being is inseparable from its meaning! It is spoken. It is in the logos. But the reduction is reduction of the said to the saying beyond the logos, beyond being and non-being, beyond essence, beyond true and non-true. It is the reduction to signification, to the one-for-the-other involved in responsibility..., to the locus or non-lieu, locus and non-lieu, the utopia, of the human. It is the reduction ... to its diachrony, which ... being can not eternalize."\(^{146}\) Reducing the said to the saying is to reduce all the disembodied relationships mediated by rationality and concept to an embodied relationship mediated by sensation.

In sum, Levinas privileges the saying over the said because the former rests on an inter-subjective bodily communication. Speaking to the other differs from reducing the other to the noema through intentionality. The latter enables the subject to have an epistemological, theoretical and technical character that can reduce the other to a theme or image. This is unethical, for Levinas, because it discourages the subject from disclosing his or her life towards the other. This destroys the most important condition for building up an embodied ethical relation between the subject and the other. Moreover,

\(^{146}\) Emmanuel Levinas, _Otherwise than Being_, pp. 44-5.
Levinas shows us that without the aid of any external linguistic systems, one's body, bodily sensation and bodily exposure can generate an ethical meaning that transgresses various kinds of boundaries. In other words, the body per se is a signifying ethical body that can facilitate an ethical communication between subject and other.

2.3. The Passive Structure of the Ethical Subject

Levinas’s philosophy is not only a philosophy of the other but also a philosophy of subjectivity. After showing the inter-subjective dimension of Levinas' philosophy, this subsection will highlight the structure of the Levinasian subject. Unlike the Cartesian or Husserlian active cognitive subject who can treat the other as his or her object of apprehension, Levinas’ ethical subject, who is already subordinated to the other in proximity, is simply a “passive subject.” Critchley states it clearly: for Levinas, “the relation to the other lives on as an imprint in the subject to which it responds but which it cannot comprehend. That is, there is something at the heart of me, that arguably makes me the ‘me’ that I am, but which is quite opaque to me.”147 The Levinasian ethical subject is passive because its subjectivity is pre-formed or pre-determined by the non-I (the other). That is to say, the other, not the subject, determines the “content” of the subject’s identity.

147 Simon Critchley, InfinitelyDemanding, p. 62.
Levinas asserts the importance of the passivity of the subject because he wants to counteract the active and manipulative nature of the rational subject that fails to recognize the ethical potentiality of the passive subject. In fact, the Western philosophical tradition, which has a strong metaphysical desire to search for the order of things, never "knows" passivity. Levinas says, "Western philosophy ... remains faithful to the order of things and does not know the absolute passivity, beneath the level of activity and passivity, which is contributed by the idea of creation. Philosophers have always wished to think of creation in ontological terms, that is, in function of a preexisting and indestructible matter."\textsuperscript{148} For Levinas, passivity is the primordial mode of subjectivity prior to intentionality and will. Levinas affirms the passivity of the subject in Otherwise than Being in order to distinguish prevoluntary, previrtuous, preconscious and premoral "passivity" from the constellation of free will, choice, consent, or denial, and in this sense, of autonomy and heteronomy.\textsuperscript{149}

Passivity does not mean merely that the subject gives up his or her own right before the other or fails to control the other; rather it primarily refers to a predestined attachment to the other. Levinas says that "the oneself cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity... This passivity is that of an attachment that has already been made, as

\textsuperscript{148} Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 110.
something irreversibly past, prior to all memory and all recall."150 In other words, passivity refers to the other’s obsessive attachment to the subject’s life that is prior to the subject’s consciousness. The subject cannot reject such an obsessive attachment.

Thus, passivity, for Levinas, also refers to the powerlessness of the subject before the other’s irresistible ethical command. Since proximity is mediated by bodily sensibility, not by consciousness, the immediacy of sensibility makes the subject passively and powerlessly respond to the suffering other without any deliberation: “In the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give. It is thus one and unique, in passivity from the start, having nothing at its disposal that would enable it to not yield to the provocation.”151 The passivity of the subject is reinforced in his or her bodily exposure to wounds and outrages that makes the subject incapable of resigning or escaping from the other. For Levinas, the body is neither “obstacle” nor “tomb”, which is what Plato and some rationalists such as Descartes think; rather the body is an important condition for the incarnation of the other’s life in the subject’s life: “The body is neither

149 Adriaan Peperzak, Beyond, p. 76.
150 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 104.
151 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 105.
an obstacle opposed to the soul, nor a tomb that imprisons it, but that by which the self is susceptibility itself. Incarnation is an extreme passivity; to be exposed to sickness, suffering, death, is to be exposed to compassion, and, as a self, to the gift that costs."\textsuperscript{152}

Here, incarnation does not simply mean an "intimate relationship" between subject and other; rather it refers to a compassionate intercorporeal relationship.

Levinas' passive and powerless subject is not a "coward subject" who is indifferent to the injustice of the other or the suffering of the world. Paradoxically, it is passivity that makes the subject become ethical. Thus, "passivity" is a keyword for us to characterize the basic structure of Levinas' ethical subject. In \textit{Otherwise than Being}, Levinas employs various metaphors such as "substitution", "hostage", "persecuted" or "obsessed" to illustrate the passive structure of the ethical subject. As Peperzak says, "the structure of subjectivity is extensively analyzed in chapter 4 of \textit{Otherwise than Being}. The central word there is 'substitution', but a host of other expressions clarify, interpret, or deepen its meaning: to be human is to be 'the-one-for-the-Other,' a hostage, a mother, obsessed, persecuted, etc."\textsuperscript{153} The following subsections will further explore the passive character of Levinas' ethical subject.

\subsection*{2.3.1. The Guilt Structure of the Subject}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{152} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 195.}
According to Levinas, the subject has to respond to the suffering of the other in proximity, but the subject’s ethical response is never “enough” for the other because of the asymmetrical relationship between subject and other. An “unlimited responsibility” or “infinite responsibility” makes the ethical subject always “the accused subject”:

“Obsessed with responsibilities which did not arise in decisions taken by a subject ‘contemplating freely,’ consequently accused in its innocence, subjectivity in itself is being thrown back on oneself. This means concretely: accused of what the others do or suffer, or responsible for what they do or suffer. The uniqueness of the self is the very fact of bearing the fault of another. In responsibility for another subjectivity is only this unlimited passivity of an accusative which does not issue out of a declension it would have undergone starting with the nominative. This accusation can be reduced to the passivity of the self only as a persecution, but a persecution that turns into an expiation. Without persecution the ego raises its head and covers over the self. Everything is from the start in the accusative.”  

For Levinas, the uniqueness of the ethical subject is not formed by his or her moral

achievement, but by his or her fault. In particular, the Levinasian subject is accused that he or she always fails to take responsibility for the other or gives an inadequate care for the suffering other. Thus, the ethical subject has a "guilt sense," because "bearing the fault of another" is the "destiny" of the subject. Of course, this does not mean that it is impossible for the passive subject to reject or to disagree with the other. But as Peperzak says, for Levinas, if the subject wants to reject the other, he or she is also against his or her ethical being: "my being for-the-other, my being responsible, a hostage and a substitute, does not wait for my consent to make me fulfill this responsibility. I am not capable of preventing this transcendence; if I tried, I would at the same time be involved in destroying my being what I always already am."

Persecution, for Levinas, finally "turns into an expiation." Taking responsibility for the other is not a "charity", in which the subject attempts to show or testify his or her righteousness and generosity to the other through caring for the other. Rather it is a religious sacrifice. Jeffrey L. Kosky says, "Expiation is not an act that an I, after conscious deliberation, chooses to do.... Rather, expiation befalls me from the other; and in its befalling me, I am myself--as if I, the I, were a hostage. I am myself in my being an expiation for others without my willing it. I am myself in my being sacrificed for others"

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154 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 112.
without this happening on my own initiative."\textsuperscript{156} For Levinas, if offering one's life were assumed by its own generosity,\textsuperscript{157} it would be an egoist or self-righteous offering.

Thus, for Levinas, understanding the ethical subject as the "persecuted subject" is necessary to defeat the egoist mentality of the subject: "In obsession the accusation effected by categories turns into an absolute accusative in which the ego proper to free consciousness is caught up. It is an accusation without foundation, to be sure, prior to any movement of the will, an obsessional and persecuting accusation. It strips the ego of its pride and the dominating imperialism characteristic of it."\textsuperscript{158} A subject's being persecuted or accused by the other denies the manipulative character of the subject. This not only urges the subject to be liable for the other but also strips the pride and the imperialist character of the subject.

The infinite ethical demand of the other undermines the competence of the imperialist and egoist subject because the subject finds that his or her responsibility for the other is "unlimited." In particular, in persecution, the subject finds that the "debt" of the other is already incarnated in his or her life. Thus, the subject's freedom and freewill are restricted and limited by the persecution of the other. The other assigns the

\textsuperscript{155} Adriaan Peperzak, \textit{Beyond}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{157} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{158} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 110.
responsibility to the subject without first asking for his or her permission. As Gibbs says, for Levinas, if one in persecution has found that one is liable for what is not only contrary to one's will but what destroys one's will, then one finds the element of responsibility that is only a being for the other and cannot be for itself: “the assignment of responsibility, the ethical need to respond is not chosen or assumed, but happens to me, making me into a me. Suffering is not invited by an act of will (without making the act intervene), but in undergoing it is accepted or asked for without attention.” Since the assignment of responsibility just happens to the subject, the unpredictability of responsibility further undermines the manipulative character of the subject.

In sum, a righteous subject, for Levinas, is not a subject free from persecution; rather the more righteous I am, the more guilty I am: “The more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible; the more just I am, the more guilty I am. I am ‘in myself’ through the others.” That is to say, a righteous subject is not a morally perfect subject or “saint”; rather the subject is always guilty of his or her “late or inadequate response” towards the other. Paradoxically, only such a sense of guilt can motivate the subject to become ethical. Thus, being

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persecuted by the other is a way of humbling oneself and giving up one’s power through suffering for the other.

2.3.2 The Traumatic Structure of the Subject

In addition to the guilt structure of the subject, Levinas’ subject also has a traumatic structure. In order to respond to the ethical command of the other, the Levinasian subject has to expose itself to the other and substitute for the suffering other with his or her fragile body. Since the immediacy of the bodily communication between the subject and the other leaves no “room” for the subject to choose not to be wounded by the other, Levinas’ subject becomes “defenseless”: “In the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked as irreplaceable, as devoted to the others, without being able to resign, and thus as incarnated in order to offer itself, to suffer and to give. It is thus one and unique.”161 The subject suffers in this exposure because he or she is being knotted with the other (the other’s suffering bodily life is already incarnated in the subject’s life), so that the subject can feel and experience what the other feels or experiences in the substitution.

In other words, the other brings a traumatic shock to the subject in proximity.

160 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 112.
161 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 105.
Trauma is unpredictable; it is a psychological violence brought by the other to the subject. Accident always causes traumatic neurosis in the subject, because the subject is not ready to face the suffering experience or even death brought by the unpredictable accident. This turns the subject’s organized world into a disorganized and chaotic world. Thus, trauma is a harsh attack on the subject’s ego, because it always shocks the subject without warning.

For the subject, meeting with the other is a traumatic experience. The subject never predicts and knows when the traumatic other will interrupt him or her with an unexpected traumatic experience. Since the traumatic command comes suddenly to the subject, it drastically shocks the subject. And such a traumatic shock turns Levinas’ subject into a traumatic subject. Critchley says, “for Levinas, the ethical demand is a traumatic demand, it is something that comes from outside the subject, from a heteronomous source, but which leaves its imprint within the subject. At its heart, the ethical subject is marked by an experience of hetero-affectivity. In other words, the inside of my inside is something outside, the core of my subjectivity is exposed to otherness.” Since the traumatic experience of the other not only shocks the subject but also embraces the subject’s life, the trauma has divided the subject. Thus, to a certain extent, Levinas’ subject is also a split subject, because his or her core is already divided by the ethical demand of the other
in his or her exposure to the other. The subject’s ego is shaken by the overwhelming
trauma. Yet, paradoxically, the ethical identity of the subject is re-formed in such a
“destructive split.” As Critchley says, “the ethical subject is defined by the approval of a
traumatic heteronomous demand at its heart. But, importantly, the subject is also divided
by this demand, it is constitutively split between itself and a demand that it cannot meet,
but which is that by virtue of which it becomes a subject.”163 In other words, Levinas’
subject is formed in a “destructive construction” brought by his or her bodily exposure to
the other.

Furthermore, since no one can replace the subject’s ethical position to suffer for the
other, this intensifies his or her degree of suffering in the trauma. But such an
irreplaceable character of the subject also marks the uniqueness of the subject. By
uniqueness, Levinas refers to “the impossibility of slipping away and being replaced....
The uniqueness of the chosen one or required one, who is not a chooser, is a passivity not
being converted into spontaneity. This uniqueness not assumed, not subsumed, is
traumatic; it is an election in persecution.”164 For Levinas, what characterizes the unique
identity of the subject is not knowledge or virtue, but the suffering and traumatic

164 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 56.
experience of the subject: “To be oneself, otherwise than being, to be disinterested, is to bear the wretchedness and bankruptcy of the other.” Interestingly, the subject per se cannot determine his or her uniqueness; rather it is the persecuting other who determines the uniqueness of the subject.

In fact, we can see that the later Levinas’ notion of the subject of suffering is a response to his earlier notion of the subject of enjoyment. In Totality and Infinity, Levinas treats enjoyment as the basic concern of the subject. The subject is an egoist being whose only concern is his or her own “happiness” and “self-interest.” The subject must first take care of his or her self; caring for the other is never the subject’s first priority. Now Levinas stresses that the presence of the suffering other must divert the subject from the care of the self to the care of the other. Moreover, caring for the other is never enjoyable; rather it is painful since it conflicts with the basic living mode of the subject (enjoyment). Although both enjoyment and suffering are modes of sensation, only the sensibility of suffering, for Levinas, can make possible a truly ethical subject: “The subjectivity of subjection of the self is the suffering of suffering, the ultimate offering oneself, or suffering in the offering of oneself. Subjectivity is vulnerability, is sensibility.”

165 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 117.
166 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 54.
For Levinas, pain is not simply a negative feeling or an emotional damage; rather it is "a pure deficit, an increase of debt in a subject that would be for itself." More important, "pain comes to disturb an enjoyment in its very isolation," "tears me from myself." and "penetrates into the very heart of the for-oneself that beats in enjoyment." Pain is not simply an interruption, but an ethical interruption. The more pain one feels, the more debt one has. In pain, the subject senses the urge of responsibility. In particular, pain makes one give one's life in proximity, like a mother who nurtures and protects her fragile baby in parenting. To give, for Levinas, is proximity itself, in which the subject "is to take the bread out of one's mouth, to nourish the hunger of another with one's own fasting."168

In other words, pain has an ethical intentional character that not only interrupts the subject's self-centered life but also "diverts" the subject from a mode of enjoyment to a mode of suffering, in which the subject can sense the suffering of the other. Thus, pain enriches the bodily life of the subject. Since the subject in enjoyment is always the separated subject detaching from the other and indifferent to the other, an ethical sensibility can help re-unite the body of the separated subject with the body of the other. But "unity" is neither an abstract conceptual unity such as synthesis nor a metaphysical unity such as ontology. Rather it is a corporeal unity that mingles two concrete bodies

167 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 56.
mediated through the physical bodily pain. As Levinas says, it is the corporeality that
unites “for the other,” “despite oneself,” “the pain of labor in the patience of ageing” and
“the duty to give to the other.”¹⁶⁹ In other words, unity, for Levinas, is a bodily unity,
which is mediated by how the subject feels, responds and acts for the pain of another
suffering body.

In sum, while Levinas rejects the pleasure as an essential sensual mode to make one
become ethical in Totality and Infinity, he affirms the pain as an essential sensual model
in Otherwise than Being. Pain, for Levinas, is an ethical sensation that not only makes
one sense the other’s suffering, but also arouses one’s ethical responsibility towards the
other.

D. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, while Levinas criticizes rationalism and essentialism, his
anti-essentialism and anti-rationalism do not eliminate an ethical ground for defending
the dignity of human beings. In fact, Levinas’ anti-foundational critique of the ontological
discourse of human being does not reject the value of human beings or subjects; rather it
“deconstructs” a rational or totalizing apprehension of human beings that destroys the
alterity and infinity of human beings. More important, after “deconstructing” the rational

¹⁶⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 56.
construction of subjectivity, Levinas reconstructs a new ethical embodied subject for whom sensation, not consciousness, is a primordial way to connect with the other. Since such a new ethical embodied subject no longer masters the other through consciousness or intentionality, he or she can directly sense the suffering of the other and build up an ethical relationship with the other. Furthermore, such an ethical embodied subject, who is totally passive and vulnerable in his or her response to the ethical demand of the other, can also "deconstruct" the manipulative rational subject.

In other words, the subject, for Levinas, is not ethical in itself. The subject cannot become ethical either through reasoning or exercise; rather the intervention of the other makes the subject ethical. Neither universal law nor deliberation motivates any ethical actions; rather it is the infinite other that motivates the subject to take an ethical action. But Levinas' ethics is not simply about the other's ethical demand/command; rather it is also about an intersubjective embodied relationship where the subject and other's bodies are unconditionally exposed for each other. And it is this risky exposure of bodily life that makes possible an ethical embodied subject and diverts the subject from a self-centered life to an other-centered life. In the saying, a bodily exposure, Levinas further shows that the body per se, which does not need the aid of any external linguistic systems, also has

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162 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 155.
ethical meaning. In other words, the body is not a culturally textual body; rather its vitality can generate meaning by itself. Thus, for Levinas, the other, the physical body and bodily sensation are the essential conditions for building up a truly ethical life and ethical subjectivity.

For Levinas, care of the self cannot lead to care of the other. The subject neither becomes ethical by oneself nor becomes righteous through handling different techniques of the self. In contrast, it is the intervention of the other that makes the subject ethical and righteous. It is the care of the other that ultimately generates a new subject’s life. This makes Levinas’ ethics differ from Foucault’s ethics.

Although Foucault and Levinas have different directions and understandings of being ethical, both of them assert the importance of the body as the essential condition to rebuild an ethical life and ethical subjectivity after the critique of rationalism and modernity. Both of them rediscover the ethical potentiality of the body, which they think is repressed by Western rationalism. Furthermore, both Foucault and Levinas agree that ethics is not about rule-making or rule-obedience; rather it is about a fundamental relationship between the subject and the other. While both of them criticize the legalistic and rational nature of morality, their critiques do not deny ethics, nor do they give up looking for an alternative model of being ethical. In the next chapter, I will examine the
distinctions and commonalities between Foucault and Levinas’ embodied ethics and embodied subjectivity, in order to see how they can enrich each other.
Chapter Four. Foucault and Levinas on the Ethical Embodied Subjectivity: A Critical Evaluation

Having looked at Foucault and Levinas' notions of ethical embodied subjectivity respectively, now I shall discuss their differences and commonalities. The comparison will be divided into four aspects. First, I shall compare and comment on the normative ground of their critique of rationalism and rational subjectivity. Second, I shall compare their understandings of the ethical dimension of the embodied subject and examine how they formulate the relationship between the subject and the other. Third, I shall compare their understandings of the body and ethics, especially showing their different approaches to bodily sensation and the body. Finally, I shall compare their discussions of ethical language and pedagogy and see how they assess the limitation and potentiality of language in ethical terms. My comparison not only looks at the commonalities and differences of their notions of ethical embodied subjectivity but also shows how Levinas and Foucault’s projects can complement each other and generate a more comprehensive and solid understanding of ethical embodied subjectivity.

A. Foucault and Levinas’ Critique of the Disembodiment of Rational Subjectivity

Both Foucault and Levinas criticize the problematic nature of a rational epistemological subject formulated by modern thinkers such as Descartes and Husserl. They argue that
such a rational subject, which privileges consciousness and intentionality over bodily sensation, not only distorts the notion of ethics and philosophy but also violently represses the other.

For Foucault, the Cartesian notion of philosophy, which simply reduces philosophy to methodology and turns the notion of truth into theoretical truth, is problematic because it violates the ancient Greek notion of philosophy as a way of life. More important, the Cartesian notion of thinking is disembodied and does not demand transformation of the body in the activity of knowing. This is to say that the subject does not need to engage the world and the other with his or her body.

In *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault argues that the disembodied subject, who separates his or her body from the world, constructs a “static subject” and “static truth” that fails to actualize a dynamic life-transforming philosophy. In fact, what matters for Foucault is not how the subject can be trained to manipulate the world conceptually and logically, but how the subject's being can be transformed by the world in his or her activity of knowing: “the modern age of the history of truth begins when knowledge itself and knowledge alone gives access to the truth. That is to say, it is when the philosopher (or scientist, or simply someone who seeks the truth) can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else.
being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject."¹

Thus, Foucault argues, the Cartesian philosophy is problematic because its rational approach to truth generates a disembodied truth, rather than an embodied truth. The former is against life, whereas the latter can enrich life through a bodily transformation.

The normative ground of Foucault's critique of the Cartesian subject and philosophy rests on a Greek notion of spirituality. For the Greeks, philosophical training is a spiritual exercise, which is not only about the use of reason but also about the use of different techniques/exercises of the self. Spirituality is "the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformation on himself in order to have access to the truth."² These exercises, such as purifications, ascetic exercises and renunciation, can help the subject to acquire knowledge or wisdom about life. In particular, spiritual exercises offer the subject a habit or technique of care for bodily life so that an aesthetic style of life can be lived. That is to say, for the Greeks as for Foucault the aim of the spiritual practices is not merely the generation of knowledge about life, but the cultivation the subject's very being. Inspired by ancient Greek philosophers, the later Foucault regards truth-searching/philosophizing as a bodily and spiritual exercise, not a rational deliberation or speculation. He privileges the former over the latter because only

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 18.
² Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.
the former can cultivate an aesthetic and ethical form of living that can fight against a lifeless living style informed by rationalism.

Although Foucault criticizes the Cartesian rational subject, this does not mean that he denies the epistemological dimension of the subject that Descartes affirms. The difference between Descartes and Foucault is that Descartes treats the subject’s mind as the only way to approach truth, whereas Foucault treats the subject’s whole body as the way to approach truth. Since Descartes privileges the logic of the mind and encourages a disembodied approach to truth, his model generates a merely static form of disembodied truth that cannot touch the very being of the subject. Against Descartes, Foucault argues that if we can attain truth through bodily conversion or bodily exercise rather than through logic or mind, then such an embodied truth can get in touch with the human life more deeply.

Like Foucault, Levinas argues that Western philosophy has a strong desire to manipulate the world and the other through the construction of ontology. This desire has turned the dynamic form of the world and the other into a static object. Levinas further criticizes the epistemological subject who privileges consciousness and rationality as one who represses the other by reducing the infinity of the other to system and concept.

For Levinas, such an epistemological subject, who represses the bodily sensation,
eliminates the ethical potentiality of the subject. For example, Levinas claims that
Husserl's phenomenology, which privileges intuition and intention over sensibility, fails
to recognize the ethical potentiality of the immediacy of the sensible, an immediacy that
can enable the subject to be sensitive to the vulnerability and suffering of the other. The
Husserlian subject fails to respond to the need of the other since the subject's empathetic
capacity, which is facilitated by bodily sensation, is already repressed by the subject's
consciousness.

According to Levinas, redeeming bodily sensation from the domestication of
consciousness is important for making a subject ethical. Indeed, Levinas' critique of the
solitary subjectivity and affirmation of the transcendental status of the other not only
reclaims the relational dimension of subjectivity but also asserts the importance of bodily
sensation. Without bodily sensation, it is impossible for the subject to take responsibility
for the other. In other words, bodily sensation is a necessary condition for the subject's
being ethical. Thus, Levinas' critique of the problematic nature of the rational subject
aims at constructing an ethical embodied subject to replace an epistemological
disembodied subject.

Both Foucault and Levinas reveal the problem of rational subjectivity. In particular,
they highlight the limitations of rational thought and its repression of the body and bodily
sensation. Both Foucault and Levinas argue that the problem of the conceptualization of
the rational mind is the mind's disembodied nature. For Foucault, the Cartesian logical
mind simply defines the embodied subject as a mechanical "thinking machine" and
reduces embodied truth to disembodied truth. For Levinas, the rational subject, who is
driven by a metaphysical desire, reduces the embodied subject to the disembodied subject.
Such a rational subject represses all bodily communication, thereby preventing the
establishment of an ethical, embodied relationship. Simply put, both Foucault and
Levinas' critical projects are intended to reveal the limitation or even the violent nature of
the disembodiment of the rational subject, so as to "redeem" the bodily dimension of
truth, ethics, subject and other, which are repressed by rationalism.

Although Foucault and Levinas' critiques of the disembodied subject and their
affirmation of the embodied subject share some similarities, their normative ground
remains different. First, their methodology is different. The later Foucault's critique of the
rational subjectivity rests on ancient Greek spirituality that emphasizes the importance of
bodily practices in philosophizing. Foucault argues that unlike Cartesian rationalism, in
Greek spirituality one can truly transform one's life through changing one's body. Yet he
does not totally reject the epistemological dimension of subjectivity. Rather he argues that
ancient Greek spirituality can offer us a more flexible and dynamic approach to truth
since Greek philosophers believe that truth can be attained through bodily transformation. Thus, although Foucault criticizes the disembodied rational subject, he still asserts the epistemological capacity of bodily practices and affirms an intimate relation between care of the self and cultivation of virtue.

In contrast, Levinas' critique of the rational subjectivity is basically a phenomenological critique, although his notion of infinity and the absolute other is deeply inspired by Judaism. If phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty says, is about "unveiling the pre-theoretical layer" of human experience upon which the theoretical attitude of the scientific conception of the world is based,3 then the pre-theoretical layer that Levinas' phenomenology reveals is the "non-conceptualized" bodily sensation that is prior to intentional consciousness. Levinas argues unless we can understand human beings as sensual beings driven by enjoyment, pleasure and desire, we will never understand what constitutes the very being of the subject. And if we fail to recognize the ethical potentiality of "non-conceptualized" bodily sensations such as suffering, pain or fear, we can never become ethical subjects who can take responsibility for the other. Only "non-conceptualized" sensations can arouse the subject's awareness towards the suffering of the other.

Unlike Foucault, Levinas is skeptical of ancient Greek thought due to its egoism: "the ideal of Socratic truth thus rests on the essential self-sufficiency of the same, its identification in ipseity, its egoism." For Levinas, Greek philosophy, which privileges ontology, encounters the same problem as rationalism because both have a manipulative metaphysical desire to capture the essence of human beings through ontological discourse. Put simply, Greek philosophy fails to respect the singularity and difference of human beings. More crucially, Levinas claims that ancient Greek philosophy cannot generate a subject of responsibility that rests on the notion of passivity: "The rational subjectivity bequeathed to us by Greek philosophy...does not feature that passivity which...I have identified with the responsibility for the other." In contrast, although Foucault is also concerned with the importance of the singularity of human beings, he is more satisfied with ancient Greek philosophy, particularly its notion of spirituality.

One is tempted to think that Foucault is less sensitive than Levinas towards the problematic nature of Greek's notion of ontology. But if we look at the nature of Greek truth on which Foucault and Levinas focus, we may find that they refer to different aspects of Greek truth. While Levinas is concerned with the scientific aspect of Greek

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4 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 44.
truth, Foucault is concerned with the aesthetic and ethical aspect of Greek truth, especially its aesthetic dimension of existence. In other words, what attracts Foucault is not Greek scientific truth critiqued by Levinas, but aesthetic truth related to the stylization of the individual subject.

Although both Foucault’s aesthetics of existence and Levinas’ ethics of the other affirm the singularity of human beings, this does not mean that Levinas would agree with Foucault’s argument. For Levinas, the stylization of the self does not necessarily generate responsibility for the other, and Foucault’s affirmation of the singularity of the subject does not necessarily lead to the defense of the singularity of the other. This is because Foucault and the Greeks fail to give the other a transcendent status. Since Foucault sees the relationship between self and other as a symmetrical rather than an asymmetrical relationship, Foucault’s care of the self does not necessarily lead to care of the other, because of the subject’s egoist mentality. According to Levinas, care of the other is possible only if we can give the other a transcendent status that can limit the egoist mentality of the subject.

Levinas’ critique of rationalism is more radical than Foucault’s since he does not simply replace a “bad” philosophy/epistemology with a “good” philosophy/epistemology. Unlike Foucault, Levinas does not look for an embodied epistemology that can generate
an embodied truth; rather, he treats ethics, not epistemology, as first philosophy. Since Levinas believes that ethics is prior to ontology, he never highlights the importance of the subject's epistemological capacity in his project. Thus, although bodily communication between the subject and the other has a cognitive dimension, Levinas does not emphasize the epistemological or cognitive dimension of the subject, since he is concerned with the problem of the ontological violence implicit in epistemology. Instead, he subsumes all domains of life, especially the cognitive dimension, under ethics. For Levinas, ethics, not epistemology or ontology, is first philosophy.

In contrast, Foucault's critique is more comprehensive than Levinas'. Later works such as *History of Sexuality* and *Hermeneutics of the Subject* attempt to offer an alternative ethical and epistemological model that can respond to the problems brought by Christianity and modernity. For Foucault, Christian legalism and rationalism, which fail to recognize the ethical and epistemological capacity of the body, generate the crisis of morality and epistemology. Interestingly, Foucault finds that it is a more "classical" ancient Greek embodied ethics and embodied epistemology that can offer him "insight" into the "modern" ethical and epistemological crisis.

In sum, although Foucault’s proposal is less radical than Levinas’, his “redemptive

6 For Foucault, the Greek way is only an inspiration, since he does not think we can apply Greek ethics directly in today’s context.
projects” are more comprehensive than Levinas’. Foucault does not deny the epistemological capacity of the subject even though he finds that the “crisis of truth/philosophy” is caused by the Cartesian rationalism. Instead, he goes back to ancient Greek philosophy to look for an alternative epistemological mode for the future development of philosophy. In contrast, Levinas is more “radical” because he “overcomes” the violent nature of rationalism by subverting the hegemony of epistemology/ontology and regarding ethics as the “ultimate ground” of philosophy so as to limit the violent nature of epistemology/ontology.

B. Foucault and Levinas on the Ethical Relation of Subject and Other

Foucault and Levinas not only construct a new embodied subjectivity that can replace a rational or conscious disembodied subject but also explore the relational dimension of this new embodied subject. Both of them are concerned with the ethical relationship between the subject and the other, and they redefine the notion of the ethical so as to subvert traditional understandings of ethics and morality.

Both Foucault and Levinas attempt to redefine the notion of ethics so as to distinguish it from the traditional understanding of morality that simply reduces ethics to norm-making and norm-obeying. In History of Sexuality, Foucault distinguishes the meaning of morality from ethics. Foucault argues that morality is about behavior-coding
or rule-making, in which the moral subject has to be governed by abstract universal norms. These moral norms serve as a “moral code,” a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching for the purpose of monitoring and controlling the subject’s behavior so as to force the subject to conform to the norm. Thus, morality refers to a set of values and rules of action that are prescribed to individuals through various social institutions. In particular, Christian moral teachings accurately demonstrate the meaning of the moral coding because the church always aims to exert a disciplinary power over the subjects’ body either through doctrine or confession.

Foucault not only criticizes how the power of moral code disciplines human beings but also reveals how bodily manipulation constitutes the modern form of subject. Johanna Oksala argues that, for Foucault, “Bodily manipulation produces or constitutes modern forms of the subject by being an integral component of biopower, which not only controls subjects but also constitutes them through the normalizing effects...”7 Thus, Foucault’s genealogical critique of Christian sexuality not only illustrates the problem of disembodiment in Christian morality but also reveals its repressive effect of normalizing what forms “the constitutive condition of subjectivity.”8 For Foucault, Christian morality is an anti-body morality because it negates and represses the sexual and sensual

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8 Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, p. 102.
dimension of the body.

Although Foucault criticizes Christian morality, he does not reject ethics. Indeed, what Foucault rejects is only a universalized and legalistic form of morality that denies the particularity and freedom of the ethical subject. Therefore, while Foucault rejects the universal form of Christian morality, he treats ancient Greek ethics as a flexible and non-legalistic form of moral teachings, which he thinks can enrich our ethical practices after modernity. For Foucault, ethics is *ethos*. It is a mode of being and a way to behave, rather than a rule of life. It is about the question of the good life for a particular person living in a particular culture or society at a particular period.

According to Foucault, there are three differences between Greek ethics and Christian morality. First, the Greek ethical subject is asked to cultivate a desirable character that he or she wants to be. Christian morality does not leave “room” for the ethical subject to choose what he or she wants to be. Second, Greek ethics views care of the self as a basic practice of the ethical subject and a condition of care of the other. If one does not know how to care for one’s bodily life, one does not know how to take care of the other’s bodily life. Thus, Greek ethics views the body as the focus of ethical concern, not the object of control. Christian morality, by contrast, aims at controlling bodily life for the sake of the church’s power, not for the benefit of the subject’s and the
other’s bodily life. Third, Greek ethical subjects require different kinds of bodily practices and the guidance of the mentors to “digest” different moral teachings. Greek ethics is not a compulsive moral indoctrination that leaves no room and freedom for the subject to understand what he or she learns from the mentor. By contrast, Christian morality, which indoctrinates the moral teaching into the subject’s life through punishment, totally negates the freedom and autonomy of the ethical subject.

For Foucault, as for the Greeks, care of the self can generate care of the other. To certain extent, care of the self is the necessary condition for care of the other. Greek ethicists and Foucault suggest that care of the self should include care of the other, a technique of governing the other. Governing people, for Foucault, “is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by oneself.”9 Interestingly, Foucault views all domination as power, but not all power as domination.10 He affirms a technique of restricting and using one’s power in order to cultivate a righteous governing culture.

Thus, if one wants to govern the other righteously, one has to practice controlling one’s

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10 David Couzens Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, p. 82.
power and desire so as to cultivate the virtue of self-control in order not to abuse power towards the other.

Foucault's care of the self does not promote a self-centered aestheticism as some critics charge; rather it prepares a culture of caring for the other. Although Foucault's ethics emphasizes the stylization of the self, this does not mean that it neglects the relational and civic dimension of ethics. Instead, Foucault's ethical subject is a responsible subject who is concerned with the righteous life of the other. Labeling Foucault's care of self as an apolitical narcissism ignores the civic and virtuous content of his notion of care.

Foucault views care of the other as only the consequence of care of the self. In other words, care of the self is ethical in itself. He does not explain why care of the self must lead to care of the other, but only says that if we cannot take care of ourselves properly, we might treat the other violently. Foucault seems to presume that the ethical subject itself has an “in-born ethical urge” or “conscience” that can be “activated” by bodily exercises.

Some scholars, such as Kenneth Wain, defend Foucault, writing that Foucault is not "suggesting any sequential ordering of one's concern with proper care for oneself"

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preceding one’s care for the other...he is very clear... that one’s care for the other is
intrinsic to one’s care for oneself, not something that follows it...”¹² Even if this were
the case, which I doubt, Wain’s interpretation would still not be convincing. What makes
the subject treat the other kindly in an intersubjective relationship? What is the ethical
motivation for Foucault’s care of the other? Indeed, Foucault’s ethics of care does not
show the ontological structure between the subject and the other that Levinas does.
Foucault’s ethics is an autonomous ethics that does not need any external moral forces,
such as the absolute other, to motivate the subject to take care for the other. Here we may
see that Foucault’s optimism towards the ethical capacity of subject makes him a radical
humanist in apparent contrast to his earlier anti-humanist position.

Levinas’ ethics is anti-foundationalist and shares some similarities with Foucault’s
notion of ethics. Levinas distinguishes ethics from the postulation of moral norms. For
example, Kant’s ethics, for Levinas, which attaches ethics to a rational principle or the
universality of the law, finally reduces ethics to a moral doctrine. Although such a
rational construction of ethics can help human beings make a “right” and “safe” ethical
judgment towards different moral cases or solve different moral dilemmas, it distorts the

Peters & Tina (A.C.) Besley (eds.), Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research (New York:
fundamental meaning of ethics. Levinas argues that such an ethics, which rests on rational deliberation, is only an egoist ethics. Such a rational ethics only encourages one to take one's benefit as the prioritized reference in one's moral decision regardless of one's responsibility towards the other.

For Levinas, ethics is about a fundamental relationship between the subject and the other. This fundamental relationship is mediated by bodily sensation. Levinas' ethics emphasizes that the other and the body are the fundamental condition of being ethical. The bodily sensation of the subject, not its rational capacity, triggers the subject's sense of responsibility towards the other. The immediacy of the subject's sensibility, which enables the subject to sense the pain and suffering of the other, arouses the subject's moral sense towards the other.

For Levinas, the other's bodily life is already incarnated in the subject's bodily life. He names this intimate embodied relationship proximity. In proximity, the relationship between the subject and the other is asymmetrical: the other occupies a transcendental status that the subject can never grasp conceptually. The subject is totally passive in this asymmetrical relationship, particularly in response to the other's ethical command. By passivity, Levinas means that the subject has no room to make any rational deliberation before the other's irresistible ethical command. That is to say, the subject has to respond...
to the other’s ethical command unconditionally. Thus, Colin Davis says, responsibility for Levinas “is not an accident which befalls (and so might not befall) the subject...;

Levinassian responsibility is less generous, more imperious and ineluctable, in that it belongs to the very nature of subjectivity. I am responsible for the Other because my existence as individuated subject is entirely bound up with my relation to him or her.”13

The notion of proximity distinguishes Levinas’ ethics from traditional rational ethics. First, Levinas does not view ethics as norm-making, but as a fundamental embodied relationship between the subject and the other. In particular, ethics is about responsibility towards the other. Second, the ethical act of the subject, for Levinas, is not guided by reasoning, but by bodily sensation. Thus, Levinas’ ethics is embodied, and it treats the body as an important ethical condition. Critchley accurately says that Levinas’ ethics is “lived in the sensibility of an embodied exposure to the other.”14 Third, Levinas’ ethical subject is not the active rational subject of some moral philosophies; rather the subject is a passive embodied subject whose ethical act is passively motivated by the urge of the other. As a result, ethics for the subject becomes a “fine risk.”

In sum, Levinas’ ethical embodied subject subverts traditional understandings of the

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ethical subject that view the subject as strong and manipulative. The problem with such a rational ethical subject is that he or she is still an egoist who can eliminate the risk of his or her ethical act through rational deliberation. The passive, wounded and traumatic character of Levinas’ embodied subject subverts the active and manipulative character of the egoist subject.

We have seen that both Foucault and Levinas oppose the traditional notion of legalistic morality that is generated from Christianity and rationalism. The problem of this legalistic morality is that it reduces ethics either to behavior-coding morality (Foucault) or calculative ethics (Levinas). Its legalistic character represses rather than transforms human beings. As a result, it either fails to respect the particularity of the ethical subject (Foucault) or fails to transform the subject into a truly self-sacrificial ethical subject (Levinas).

Furthermore, both Foucault and Levinas argue that a true ethics must be an embodied ethics, rather than a disembodied legalistic morality. Foucault claims that the legalistic nature of Christian morality represses the vitality of the body through understanding the body as the sinful body. In particular, the disembodied Christian ethics treats the body as the object of control, not the subject of stylization that Greek philosophers suggest. For Foucault, a true ethics must be an embodied ethics, which
views the body as the focus of concern, not the object of control.

For Levinas, the problem of the legalistic morality is not only its legalistic nature but also its failure to recognize the ethical nature and potentiality of bodily sensation. Since legalistic morality simply treats ethics as detached deliberation, the ethical subject need not engage with the other with his or her bodily life. The subject keeps a safe distance from the other by disengaging communication and contact. As a result, ethics becomes “safe” rather than a “risky business” and fails to transform the self-centered subject into an ethical subject.

In addition to criticizing the repressive nature of disembodied ethics, both Foucault and Levinas argue that ethics is a fundamental relationship between the subject and the other. In particular, they are concerned with how the subject can live out a righteous life with the other. To a certain extent, their ethics are not an individualistic ethics, which merely deals with the subject’s personal moral struggle regardless of the subject’s ethical responsibility towards the other; rather they propose an intersubjective ethics or “other-centered ethics,” one which defends the dignity of the other. Although Foucault’s ethics emphasizes the stylization of the self, this does not mean that his ethics has no relational and civic dimension. In fact, for Foucault ethics is related to governing and caring for the other in a civil society; being ethical presumes a sense of liberty. Foucault
says that ethics is “the practice of liberty, the deliberate practice of liberty”; and “liberty is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the deliberate form assumed by liberty.”¹⁵ For Levinas, ethics also refers to the subject’s responsibility towards the other that is already incarnated in proximity, a righteous embodied relationship. Defending the life of the other becomes the core of the subject’s life. Therefore, neither Foucault nor Levinas’ ethics is an apolitical individualistic ethics, but a political civic ethics that can involve an ethical concern towards the dignity of the other.

Furthermore, both Foucault and Levinas’ ethics are “micro-ethics” rather than a “macro-ethics.” “Macro-ethics” concerns the making of different kinds of social norms, orders, and grand narratives through which the order of human society is organized and the ethical identity of the human being is constructed. Macro-ethics, which rests on a reductionist logic, imposes an abstract and universal moral norm on various kinds of human beings regardless of their particularity and diversity. Very often, macro-ethics defines and governs human beings with a totalizing moral norm or grand narrative so as to repress the freedom of human beings and maintain the legitimacy of the status quo.

One of the classic examples is the Chinese Cultural Revolution. With the guidance of a

radical Maoist-Socialist ideology of class struggle, the Cultural Revolution arbitrarily reduced different kinds of social relationships to a class relationship and used a class struggle ethics to replace various kinds of ethics. More importantly, such a class ethics simply judged moral conduct according to social class. For example, if one is a businessman, then one’s life must be morally corrupted due to the intrinsically greedy character of the bourgeois, and thus one needs to receive re-education or punishment from the proletariat. Such a reductionist class ethics completely violates and distorts different kinds of social relationships, e.g., kinship. For instance, if a proletarian’s father is a merchant or businessman, then for this proletarian, his or her father is no longer a father, but a bourgeois. Therefore, this father has to receive re-education or even violent punishment from his child according to the Maoist teachings. Macro-ethics not only negates the difference of human beings, but also dehumanizes various kinds of embodied human relationships.

In contrast, what Foucault and Levinas propose is a micro-ethics, which treats the embodied relation between the subject and the other as a “foundation” or “ground” of ethics. That is to say, it is not the disembodied law, rule or grand narrative that governs the ethical life of human beings; rather ethical life is primarily governed by an intersubjective embodied relationship. This does not mean that their micro-ethics ignores
public or normative implications due to their affirmation of the intersubjective relationship. Rather, as was mentioned before, since both Foucault and Levinas consider such an embodied relationship to be a just relationship, their ethics can still serve as a public civic ethics. Foucault and Levinas’ approaches to ethics differ from macro-ethics because they insist on treating the intersubjective relationship, not the moral norm, as the most primordial form of the ethical relationship. That is to say, all moral norms have to be guided by an intersubjective embodied relationship, not vice versa. Although both Foucault and Levinas’ ethics are anti-foundational, their ethics still have a normative ground. But an intersubjective embodied relationship, not a disembodied moral rule, forms this normative ground.

Of course, Foucault and Levinas have different understandings of “the ethical distance” between the subject and the other. For Foucault, the self and the other have a

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16 This does not mean that Foucault and Levinas do not care about the making of a just societal order. For example, Foucault critically explores the nature of liberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979* (New York: Picador, 2010), and Levinas emphasizes the importance of a third party in *Otherwise than Being*. For Foucault, the problem of liberalism is that it endorses a neutral political order that makes possible a limitless police state. For Levinas, the third party is present in the proximity of the other, because the other is not merely my other, but it implies the possibility of others (the third party) for whom I am another for the others. Thus, the third demands justice. As Levinas writes: “Justice is impossible without the one that renders it finding himself in proximity. His function is not limited to the ‘function of judgment,’ the subsuming of particular cases under a general rule. The judge is not outside the conflict, but the law is in the midst of proximity. Justice, society, the State and its institutions, exchanges and work are comprehensible out of proximity,” Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 159. As Colin Davis writes, “the proximity of the third party reveals the potential existence of innumerable subjects any of whom, including myself, can play the role of Other to others. So, the discovery of the third party disturbs the intimacy of my relationship with the Other, provoking a questioning which opens up broader perspectives and lays the foundation of society. The subject is led to question its place in the world, which brings about the birth of consciousness and instigates a concern for social justice.” Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 83.
symmetrical relationship, which means the subject has a balanced relationship with the other. He writes that the practices of the self can entail the development of “symmetrical and reciprocal relationships.” For Levinas, the relationship between the subject and the other is asymmetrical, which means the other is superior to the subject. Such an asymmetrical relation can never be “balanced” by what the subject does. For Levinas, this asymmetrical relation presumes an infinite ethical responsibility given to the subject. In particular, the other for the subject is a transcendent other; and the ethical subject is always the passive subject.

In contrast, for Foucault, the subject’s responsibility towards the other is not infinite, though the subject has an obligation to take care for the other. He does not presume that the other’s ethical demand is irresistible as Levinas argues. Furthermore, the relationship between subject and other, for Foucault, is not a pre-given relationship. Foucault’s other is neither a fragile nor a transcendent other; he or she does not enjoy a privileged status that Levinas’ transcendent other enjoys. Foucault’s ethical subject is not a passive wounded subject; rather he or she is an autonomous stylish subject who is free to create his or her ethical identity through bodily exercises. Foucault’s ethical subject is an active ethical agent.

Foucault emphasizes that the care of the self is the necessary condition of the care of the other, which means care of the other is the result of the care of the self. Barry Smart writes that for Foucault, “exercise of self-mastery or self-government is regarded as a necessary precondition for the government of others.... rationality of the government of oneself is held to be the same as the rationality of the government of others.”

While Foucault argues the other is a potential focus of our responsibility, “it is always secondary to his preoccupation with the self.” More important, care of the self, for Foucault, is ethical itself.

Levinas would disagree with the ethical self-sufficiency of Foucault’s subject. According to Levinas, without the intervention of the other, care of the self would not generate any ethical acts towards the other since the self is basically an egoist subject. And such an egoist self, who is only concerned with self-enjoyment, can never be ethical in itself. Benda Hofmeyr correctly observes: “the self in Foucault is actively partaking in own ethical becoming. Levinas, on the other hand, regards economic life as pre- or unethical. The existent is left to passively await intervention of the Other, an intervention which would signal a turning point in the life of the existent—the egoist itself existent is

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19 Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility,” p. 89.
made aware of its egoist ways and turned into the ethical subject.”

In other words, unlike Foucault’s active ethical agent, Levinas’ subject is a passive ethical agent.

In addition, Levinas is more concerned with the care of the other than with the care of the self. As Smart says, “Levinas places the emphasis firmly and deliberately on care for others, rather than care of the self.”

Levinas argues that encounter with the other transforms the subject into a de-centered, traumatic, wounded and guilty subject. Only such a fragile construction of the subject makes the subject truly ethical. That is to say, Levinas’ subject has to be “wounded” in his or her life, rather than to care for his or her life in his or her ethical formation. Of course, as was mentioned before, Levinas does not reject or ignore subjectivity even though he radically criticizes it. He simply argues that a truly ethical subject must first risk his or her life for the other in order to become ethical. If the subject fails to do so, the subject not only acts against his or her ethical being but also fails to discover his own or her own self-identity: “It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself.”

In general, Foucault’s notion of responsibility is less “radical” than Levinas’ notion of responsibility. Foucault’s ethics does not treat “risky” elements, such as the losing of

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20 Benda Hofmeyr, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas* (Nijmegen: Radboud University, 2005), p. 120.
21 Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility”, p. 89.
22 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 178.
the subject’s life, as the core element of the subject’s ethical responsibility. Of course, Foucault’s ethics of speaking truth, which requires the subject to speak truthfully to the authority, i.e. the governor, might cost the subject’s life since his or her truthful discourse might irritate the governor or resist the will of the governor. However, “giving up one’s life” or “losing one’s life” for the other is still not the basic responsibility of Foucault’s ethical subject. In contrast, Levinas presumes that ethics per se is a “fine risk” that costs the subject’s life. Thus, Levinas’ responsibility and care of the other is more “radical” than Foucault’s because the former requires the subject to lose or give up his or her life for the other, not just care for the other.

Moreover, the ethical or virtuous act, for Foucault, can be learned or apprehended through different kinds of bodily practices with the aid of the mentor or philosopher. The subject’s ethical being is the outcome of bodily exercises. For Levinas, the ethical act, such as taking responsibility for the other, is not apprehended or learned through mentorship or bodily practices. Rather, the interruption of the fragile other triggers the subject’s sense of responsibility. In other words, Levinas’ ethics is an ethics of heteronomy, whereas Foucault’s ethics is an ethics of autonomy.

While Foucault and Levinas’ notions of ethics rest on different understandings of the ethical formation of the subject, this does not mean that they cannot learn from each other.
I argue the difference can make for a complementary relation between Foucault and Levinas’ ethics. First, Levinas can give us a detailed account of the ethical motivation of the subject towards the other that Foucault fails to offer. Since Foucault’s ethics does not adequately explain the ethical motivation of the subject, his ethics cannot address the following questions: What makes the subject become a truly responsible subject towards the other? Why must the subject’s care of the self lead to the care of the other? What is the ethical motivation of the subject to take care of the other? As Smart rightly argues, “it is precisely the absence of any consideration of relations with and responsibility for others which makes Foucault’s references to creating ourselves and the autonomy of personal ethics morally problematic.”

Oksala also writes, “From a Levinasian perspective it would thus seem that while Foucault managed to ‘clear the place’ of problematic humanist conceptions of the subject, he was not able to find an alternative understanding of ethical subjectivity that would still make ethics meaningful. A reflexive and critical relationship to one’s self can be constitutive of an aesthetical style of living, but only a relationship to the other can give it an ethical meaning.”

In addition, Foucault overestimates the ethical potentiality of bodily exercises, which he thinks can help to limit the subject’s power and enable the subject to generate a

24 Johanna Oksala, Foucault on Freedom, p. 205.
righteous relationship with the other. Foucault so trusts the power of Greek exercises that
he fails to take into account the possibility of their failing. I argue that, while bodily
exercises can create a free aesthetic and ethical identity for the subject, this cannot
guarantee that such a free ethical subject can treat the other in the same ethical way.

Hofmeyr rightly comments: “what remains undeveloped in the Foucaultian
/Greco-Roman scheme of ethical matters is to what extent the fully-fledged self-created
self—the self who has managed to realize the ultimate goal of care of the self, that of
self-conversion—can and will maintain a spontaneous non-reductive relationship towards
other.”25

In contrast, Levinas’ ethics offers an ethical ground for limiting the subject’s power
through affirming the importance of the interruption of the other. Thus, Levinas’
affirmation of the priority of the other can limit the power of Foucault’s self so as to
ensure that the subject would not abuse the power over the other. While Foucault
optimistically believes that one can control one’s power or desire through practices,
Levinas’ ethics pessimistically shows us that the egoism of one’s mentality can never
help one to control one’s power through the subject’s exercises. According to Levinas, it
is not bodily practices, but the other who ultimately limits the power of the subject and

25 Benda Hofmeyr, Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas, p. 93.
motivates the subject to care for the other. If the fragile life of the other is never treated as the subject’s core life, nothing, including bodily exercises, can generate a sense of responsibility for the subject.

In other words, Levinas’ ethics can offer Foucault’s ethics an ethical condition of the care of the other, showing Foucault the importance of the incarnation of the transcendent other in the subject’s life. In particular, Levinas’ critique of egoism can make Foucault aware of the impossibility of the ethical self-sufficiency of the subject, particularly in today’s self-centered hedonist culture. As Smart comments on the failure of Foucault’s care of self: “While the Greek notion of ‘taking care of one’s self’ constituted an ethical aesthetic practice of self-mastery, a practice signifying the presence of ‘ascetic themes,’ the modern context in which Foucault ruminates on the virtues of everyone’s life becoming a work of art is quite different, one in which self-discovery and self-expression prevail and hedonistic themes predominate.”

Second, while Levinas’ ethics shows us the condition of being ethical, not the practical way of being ethical, Foucault’s ethics shows us a more practical way of being ethical. The latter can show us the importance of pedagogy, spiritual exercises and mentorship in forming the ethical subject, particularly by treating bodily practices as the

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26 Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility,” p. 89.
way of internalizing ethical virtue in one’s life. Foucault’s ethics can supplement Levinas’ inadequate consideration of the importance of practices in terms of being ethical.

Perhaps one could argue that Levinas’ ethics, which treats the other as the only way to arouse the subject’s sense of responsibility, opposes any methods or practical exercises that can help make possible the ethical subject. Although the subject, for Levinas, cannot become ethical without the intervention of the other, this does not mean that he completely rejects other means, i.e., pedagogy that can “nurture” the ethical subject. To a certain extent, Levinas might conditionally accept practices and pedagogy in one’s ethical formation. Indeed, we should not forget that Levinas was in charge of École Normale Israélite Orientale, a school that offers basic Jewish education for Jewish young people. In other words, pedagogy, for Levinas, is necessary in subject-formation.

I do not think that Levinas would object to integrating practices, mentorship and pedagogy into his ethics of otherness if such integration preserves the basic teachings of his ethics, such as the proximity of the other and the passivity of the subject. In particular, I find that Foucault’s technique of the self as a skill of managing one’s desire, which trains one to be aware of one’s excess use of desire, echoes Levinas’ critique of egoism as an excessive self-enjoyment. Foucault’s ethics can offer Levinas’ ethics a practical dimension that can possibly help one to be aware of the excessive use of desire and to be
more sensitive to the need of the other in daily life. (Since the integration of Foucault’s practice of care of the self and Levinas’ care of the other is related to the use of language, a more detailed discussion will occur later).

In sum, Levinas’ affirmation of the importance of the other in one’s ethical formation can offer Foucault a detailed account of the ethical motivation of the subject that he fails to consider. In particular, Levinas’ ethics of heteronomy can correct Foucault’s overly optimistic belief towards Greek spirituality in terms of overcoming one’s egoism. At the same time, Foucault can show Levinas another way of being ethical through care of self, even though care of self should not be the sufficient condition of being ethical. At least Foucault shows us the importance of the practical dimension of ethical formation, which can make possible a comprehensive understanding of ethical formation.

C. Foucault and Levinas on the Ethical Dimension of Bodily Sensation

Both Foucault and Levinas not only re-assert the importance of the body of the subject but also explore the ethical dimension of embodiment. Their ethics explores how different kinds of bodily sensation such as pleasure, suffering or desire can make possible an ethical subject and nurture an ethical mode of life. What Foucault and Levinas reject is the disembodiment of moral doctrine, which either reduces ethics to a rational
deliberation (Levinas) or treats the body as docile (Foucault). Both rationalism and Christianity ignore and repress the ethical potentiality of the body and bodily sensation.

Levinas and Foucault agree that the ethical subject cannot be made possible without leaving room for the body. Because of the repressive tendency of rationality, they do not treat reason or consciousness as the sole or primary means of being ethical. Instead, they treat the body or "bodily sensation" as a condition of being ethical so as to release the ethical capacity or the ethical potentiality of the subject.

Thus, the following discussion will look at the commonalities and differences between their embodied ethics, in which the body is treated either as a "vehicle of ethics" (Foucault) or a "contact point" of ethics (Levinas).

For Levinas, what makes the ethical subject take care of the other is his or her bodily exposure to the weakness, vulnerability and hunger of the other. The ethical subject's sense of responsibility is not enforced by a moral law, but by a sensation of suffering animated by the other. Levinas argues that sensibility per se is sense, which is by the other and for the other. It is not an elevated feeling; rather it is like tearing bread away from the mouth that tastes it to give it to the other. Edith Wyschogrod writes that for
Levinas, "corporeality is susceptible to pain and wounding, to sickness and aging. Pain penetrates to the heart of the active cognitive self and calls it to order."  

It is the sense of pain and suffering that transforms Levinas’ subject into a de-centered ethical subject. For Levinas, the immediate bodily sensibility exposes the subject’s body to the wound of the other, making it unavoidable for the subject to be wounded and hurt by the other. This passive exposure to the other subverts the subject’s egoism: “It is the living human corporeality, as a possibility of pain, a sensibility which of itself is the susceptibility to being hurt, a self uncovered, exposed, and suffering in its skin. In its skin, it is stuck in its skin, not having its skin to itself, a vulnerability. Pain is not simply a symptom of a frustrated will. The painful of pain, the pain of labor and ageing, are adversity itself, the against oneself that is in the self.”

For Levinas, when the other interrupts the subject, the subject is subjected to the suffering of the self in which the subject’s suffering and vulnerability are also exposed to the suffering other. That is to say, the subjectivity of the subjection of the self is the suffering of self.

Here we see that Levinas treats the sense of suffering as a key to constitute an ethical and responsible subject. Such a sense of suffering not only constructs a de-centered subject but also subverts the centered subject. Husserlian phenomenology
filters out the sense of the other’s suffering and makes the subject fail to experience the other’s pain. The repression of sensation, as Wyschogrod says, fails to “evoke the subject’s capacity for experiencing pain, for emptying oneself of egoistic orientation, so that one’s corporeality may be at the service of the other.”29 In other words, the repression of the sense of suffering not only makes the subject indifferent to the suffering of the other but also fails to arouse the subject’s sense of responsibility. Levinas has to re-assert the importance of the sense of suffering so as to counter the domestication of consciousness.

For Foucault, the ethical embodied subject needs to practice different kinds of bodily exercises so as to cultivate his or her ethical character. Foucault privileges ancient Greek bodily practices, which he thinks can transform the subject into an ethical subject, i.e., a truth-speaking subject. In particular, Foucault views care of the self as a way of nurturing an ethics of desire, which includes properly regulating one’s bodily sensations (desire and pleasure) so as to enable the subject to govern the other righteously.

Foucault’s embodied ethics is not only an ethics of desire but also an ethics of truth. Greek bodily practices are concerned both with how we can become moderate subjects by managing our desires and with how we can speak “authentic subjects.” Thus, he

emphasizes Greek practices of listening, reading and speaking since they can make the
subject speak authentically and truthfully.30

Foucault views the truthful subject as more than a subject who knows the truth, as a
courageous subject who can speak the truth.31 For Foucault, becoming the subject of
enunciation of true discourse is the very core of Greek philosophical exercises. Such an
exercise is cultivated through different kinds of bodily practices in which one can learn to
“live” with one’s emotion and sensation. For instance, if one wants to cultivate the virtue
of parrhesia (the act of speaking frankly, freely and openly), one needs to learn to
overcome one’s fear and anxiety when meeting with the superior officer. If one fails to do
so, one can never speak truthfully to an authority. Thus, Foucault says, it is one’s
courageous character, not rhetoric, that makes one speak truthfully.

Foucault also argues that a stylish subject is one who can skillfully and properly
manage his or her desire. Accordingly, one needs to learn to govern desire appropriately,
so as to cultivate a moderate living style. Of course, this does not mean that we control
our desire with rules. Instead, we simply set the conditions for using and enjoying
pleasure. For Foucault, as for the Greeks, morality is an art of timing. That is to say, we
have to learn to enjoy our sexual pleasure at the right time; otherwise we never know how

30 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 15.
31 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 333.
to govern the other. Governing is always a matter of the “right time” in which we have to learn to make appropriate judgments for the other. Furthermore, one must control one’s diet and sexual activity, because failure to control one’s daily life can lead to abuse of power. Thus, if one is a governor, one must develop a technique for managing desire in order to appropriately and righteously govern the other. In other words, the purpose of Foucault’s management of desire is not to deny pleasure, but to avoid the excess use of desire or pleasure.

Both Levinas and Foucault are sensitive to the importance of the body in the construction of the ethical subject. Both of them argue that a true ethics must be an embodied ethics in which the body serves as an ethical medium and condition. They view ethics as a “performative ethics,” which means ethics needs to be performed bodily in our daily life. In other words, ethics is not possible without the “performative ethical agent”: the embodied subject. In Foucault’s case, the notion of ethics is actualized through the stylization of the subject’s bodily life. For Levinas, the meaning of being ethical is actualized through proximity, an intersubjective bodily communication. Both of them believe that true ethics requires the transformation of the subject’s bodily life. Thus, for Levinas and Foucault, being ethical is not about obeying the law or norm but about transforming the subject’s body through bodily practices (Foucault) or through bodily
interaction with the other (Levinas). Such a bodily conversion or transformation subverts legalistic morality.

In addition, while Foucault and Levinas conceive the arousal of one's bodily sense of responsibility differently, they agree that the sense of responsibility is mediated by bodily sensation. Foucault’s ethics is an ethics of autonomy in which one’s proper bodily management generates one’s sense of responsibility towards the other, whereas Levinas’ ethics is an ethics of heteronomy in which one’s sense of responsibility is aroused by the other’s body. They agree, however, that the sense of responsibility needs to be triggered by bodily sensation, not by doctrinal regulation. That is to say, both of them believe that the bodily sensation is necessary to generate the sense of responsibility.

However, Foucault and Levinas have different strategies with regard to desire. For Foucault, regulating one’s sexual and dietary pleasure is crucial in the formation of ethical subjectivity. Being inspired by a Greek ontology of desire, Foucault believes that desire is a force of transgression. Thus, one needs to manage one’s desire properly if one wants to govern the other in an ethical way. Interestingly, unlike some of Foucault’s writings that privilege the radical transgression of desire, *History of Sexuality (II)* contains a “modified” or “less-radical” position toward the use of desire. It emphasizes the regulation of desire rather than transgression. Some of Foucault’s writings such as "A
Preface to Transgression” and “What is Enlightenment?” fully recognize the transgression of the bodily pleasure and desire, especially its function of boundary-shaking as asserted by Georges Bataille. In History of Sexuality, however, Foucault tends to take a more “moderate position” towards the use of pleasure. He takes a “regulative strategy” in order to manage the “forceful” nature of pleasure rather than utilizing the unlimited force of desire to transgress different boundaries or orders.

This does not mean that Foucault has given up the ethics of transgression. The later Foucault does not deny the importance of transgression. He simply integrates the notion of transgression into the notion of self-transformation that his aesthetic of existence highlights. For Foucault, the self-transformation and self-creation of the subject will transgress the boundary and limit of self, so as to make possible a subject of liberty.

As Hofmeyr says: “We first care for ourselves to become self-mastered, but self-mastered entails self-legislation, which bears the risk of diminishing the freedom of the individual instead of safeguarding it…and that is why proper care of the self also demands transgression of the self, that is, we have to then transgress—infringe upon, go beyond, violate—ourselves!”

Transgression, for Foucault, is not simply violation; rather it is a movement between

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limit and transgression. Foucault’s subject needs to learn how to balance this movement:

"Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses. The play of limits and transgression seems to be regulated by a simple obstinacy: transgression incessantly crosses and recrosses a line which closes up behind it in a wave of extremely short duration and thus it is made to return once more right to the horizon of the uncrossable. But this relationship is considerably more complex: these elements are situated in an uncertain context, in certainties which are immediately upset so that thought is ineffectual as soon as it attempts to seize them."

Since transgression, for Foucault, is a movement beyond the alternatives of outside and inside without which we cannot reconstruct our new identity, "we have to be at the frontiers." In other words, transgression is not simply about the subversion of social norms; rather it is about the play or movement of limit and transgression. Since

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transgression is a movement or force, the subject needs to learn how to handle the force of transgression, particularly by discerning the right moment to transgress or not to transgress. It is exactly this technique of the self that Greek philosophers want their student to apprehend. As Oksala says: "...Foucault’s ethics-as-aesthetics should be understood primarily as a continuation of his permanent questioning of the limits of subjectivity and the possibilities of crossing them. His ethics represents an attempt to seek ways of living and thinking that are transgressive in the extent to which, like a work of art, they are not simply the products of normalizing power."35

Although the later Foucault appreciates the boundary-shaking function of the transgression of desire, he does not unconditionally assert the transgressive power of desire. Instead, he shows us the condition of limiting and regulating one’s excessive force of desire so as to help one to become a truly ethical and aesthetic subject who can live with his or her desire properly. Thus I regard the later Foucault’s model of use of desire as a “regulative model,” not a “subversive model.” The former highlights his strategy of regulating the movement of desire between limit and transgression, whereas the latter simply highlights the transgression of desire without taking into account Foucault’s regulative strategy towards the use of desire.

By way of contrast, in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas recognizes pleasure (enjoyment) as the basic form of life of the subject that Heidegger neglects, but he still privileges pain and suffering over enjoyment in relation to ethics. Levinas believes that only the suffering of the fragile other, which serves as a force, can transform a self-centered subject into an other-centered subject. In other words, Levinas privileges the sense of suffering over other senses because suffering is the only sense that can make the subject ethical and responsible.

Unlike Foucault, Levinas gives up trying to control or manage desire (enjoyment/pleasure). Levinas argues that it is the force of the other that finally diverts the subject from the self-centered position to the other-centered position. It is the fragile face of the other that enables the subject to avoid manipulation by hedonist pleasure. Here we see that Levinas fully recognizes the transgressive power of the other’s suffering since it can shake the boundary of the egoist self and limit the manipulative desire of the subject. For him, transgression is a powerful sensational force that can shake any conceptual or bodily boundary. In other words, for Levinas, the fragile face of the other, which carries a suffering sensation, not only captures the life of the subject but also shakes the subject’s egoist life. Thus, Levinas’ strategy is a “transgressive strategy” in which the other’s bodily sense (suffering) transgresses the subject’s egoist mentality.
through an overwhelming sensation of suffering.

In contrast, Foucault’s strategy is a “regulative strategy” in which one overcomes the excessive use of desire by appropriating different techniques to regulate one’s desire. Unlike Levinas, Foucault’s regulative strategy does not allow other sensations, such as suffering, to limit or overcome the excessive force of the desire since he believes that desire is still the most constitutive force of ethics. That is to say, Foucault never denies the importance of desire for being ethical. While I agree that some strategies of Foucault’s practices are meant to help one to overcome or even eliminate the excess use of desire, this does not mean that he denies the importance of human desire. Rather he simply wants to counterbalance the power or force of desire. For instance, the practice of speaking truthfully, including the practice of overcoming one’s cowardice, is not meant to repress one’s desire, but to equip one not to use the power to please the authority when one’s life is threatened. In other words, Foucault’s strategy is to help one to manage one’s desire and sensation, but not to replace/overcome the desire with another sensation. Here, Foucault is still Nietzsche’s follower in asserting bodily desire as the core of one’s life, though he takes a modest “regulative strategy” towards the force of desire.

While both Foucault and Levinas recognize desire as a constitutive sensation of human life, their strategy to deal with desire, especially the excess use of desire, is
different. Whereas Levinas does not believe that egoist desire can lead to the care of the other, Foucault believes that an appropriate management of desire can lead one from the care of the self to the care of the other. While Levinas believes that the suffering is “stronger” than desire in terms of its ethical potentiality, Foucault still asserts that the human desire can make possible an ethical subject if one can manage one’s desire properly. Whereas Foucault’s ethics is an ethics of desire, Levinas’ ethics is an ethics of suffering.

I argue that Levinas’ transgressive strategy can enrich Foucault’s regulative strategy. In fact, Levinas and Foucault together reveal the correlation between the excess use of desire and egoism. Foucault shares with Levinas a basic understanding of desire as generating a self-centered subject. While Foucault does not use the term “self-centered” to describe the problematic nature of the excess use of desire, his use of “power-abusing” to characterize the violent consequences of the excess use of desire implies self-centeredness. However, while Foucault sees the same problem of self-centeredness as Levinas sees, Foucault fails to see the ethical potentiality of the suffering sensation of the infinite other that can limit one’s power. Caygill says that for Levinas, “Infinity arrives with the ‘absolute resistance of the other,’ not the resistance of an opposed force (which could be a state of war between two proprietors) but a ‘resistance which has no
resistance', an ethical resistance in which 'I am no longer able to have power.'

Foucault fails to see this "absolute resistance of the other" as generated from the other’s suffering.

Moreover, Levinas would not be satisfied with Foucault’s subject because Foucault’s subject cannot "weep." Although Foucault’s subject is always hungry and can eat (as the practice of diet can show) as opposed to Heidegger’s subject who is not hungry and never eats, Foucault’s subject is not an "empathetic subject" who can sense the pain and suffering of the other. According to Foucault, it is one’s successful bodily exercise, not one’s emphatic attitude towards the suffering other, which generates one’s ethical act towards the other. In other words, Foucault’s embodied subject lacks the empathetic dimension of Levinas’ embodied subject. Foucault neither views pain as an ethical medium nor recognizes the ethical potentiality of pain. For Levinas, it is the empathetic sense released in one’s bodily exposure that makes one sense the pain of the other. Levinas recognizes the ethical potentiality of pain and suffering. In particular, sensing the other’s suffering can trigger one’s sense of guilt so that it can limit one’s power and desire.

Thus, suffering as a way of subverting egoism, as Levinas suggests, would not only

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help Foucault discern the ethical dimension and potentiality of pain and trauma, but also offer Foucault an alternative way of limiting one’s power. Furthermore, Levinas can show Foucault the importance of the sense of suffering in terms of being ethical. Thus, Levinas’ model can challenge Foucault’s overly optimistic assessment of the ethical sufficiency of subjectivity.

In addition, Foucault fails to explain clearly how the ethical subject can consciously transgress or contest the limit or border of any cultural habitus. Oksala rightly asks: “how is a subject embedded in the power/knowledge network going to encounter these borders? How can the subject engage in anything truly different, anything that would break or exceed the normalized self? How is the subject able to encounter something radically other through self-reflection: find different ways of being a subject?” In fact, the problem with Foucault’s ethics is that he so trusts the moral urge of the subject that the subject can consciously and freely transgress any repressive cultural boundary by himself or herself without the intervention of the suffering other. But daily examples show that one’s sense of responsibility is always aroused by one’s encounter with the other’s suffering.

Of course, Foucault would not defend the claim that the ethical subject needs the

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other to motivate him or her to transgress the boundary—he or she can be motivated by his or her desire. It is the intrinsic impulse of desire that motivates Foucault’s subject to transgress any repressive limits and boundaries. While I agree with Foucault that the desire of subject does have a capacity of transgression, this does not guarantee that desire can motivate the subject to act ethically, particularly in taking responsibility for the other or treating the other kindly and righteously. As Greek ethicists show, the excess of desire can motivate the subject to act unethically by abusing the power over the other. This is the reason why Greek ethics emphasizes the importance of the practice of the self so as to help one limit one’s power by managing desire. But, as was mentioned before, the bodily exercise or self-stylization cannot prevent the subject from abusing power over the other.

In contrast, for Levinas, the interruption of the other not only limits one’s power, but also motivates one to ethically transgress one’s boundary and limit. For instance, when a house is on fire, a suffering child living there can motivate his or her neighbor to leave his or her “comfort zone” (the neighbor’s house) and to risk his or her life to save him or her. Furthermore, transgression is not necessarily “good.” Some transgressions are unethical and violent acts towards the other, e.g., rape. What is required is a transgression motivated by the suffering of the other, not by the subject’s desire.

Therefore, an ethical transgression motivated by the other, as Levinas suggests, can
enable Foucault's subject to transgress his or her boundary in an ethical and non-violent way. Levinas argues the self is transgressed not through one's rational capacity or desire, but through the radical intervention of the other. It is the suffering of the radical other that can make the subject rebel against injustice. Foucault's self-transformation can become a truly ethical self-transformation only if Foucault's model can leave "room" for the intervention of the other. As Oksala comments on the possible contribution of Levinas' ethics to Foucault's:

"The other as radical alterity importantly opens the constituted subject to what it is not, to what it cannot grasp, possess or know. The arts of existence aiming to transgress normalized individuality would succeed in opening up an ethical sphere exceeding totality and determination because the other is capable of introducing alterity to the constituted subject. The other makes ethical subjectivity possible, but also breaks the totality of constituted experiences by introducing a plurality in being that resists all efforts of totalization and normalization. Only the other ultimately reveals the limits of subjectivity and gives the attempts to transgress them an ethical meaning."38

38 Johanna Oksala, Foucault on Freedom, p. 207.
With respect to the “content” of the subject, Levinas’ project focuses on the metaphysical condition of being ethical, while Foucault’s genealogical project critically reveals the historical condition of being ethical. Levinas’ subject lacks “historical content” in comparison with Foucault’s subject. To a certain extent, Levinas is concerned with the ethical form or structure of the subject, not the historical or cultural content of the subject.

In other words, Levinas’ subject is a “thin subject” with respect to the content of the subject. Of course, one could argue that Levinas’ subject is not without “contents” since he characterizes the subject as “traumatic subject” or “hostage subject.” I argue that Levinas simply characterizes the metaphysical structure of the subject, not the historical content of the subject. By content, one usually means the historical and cultural contexts that construct the subject. Levinas’ project only concerns the condition of being ethical, its metaphysical structure, not the historical and social conditions of being ethical that concern Foucault.

Foucault’s subject is “thicker” than Levinas’ subject because Foucault is concerned with the stylization of the always historically and culturally formed subject. Foucault is less interested in exploring what motivates the subject to be ethical than exploring what historical and cultural conditions constitute a free embodied subject differently from a non-free rational and Christian disembodied subject: “We must promote new forms of
subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries.”\textsuperscript{39} The old forms of subjectivity are “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”\textsuperscript{40}

Foucault wants to show that Greek culture is more “fleshly” than Christian culture or rationalism with respect to the formation of the ethical subject. Foucault’s genealogy shows that Greek culture, which respects sexuality and body, constructs a “non-repressive ethical subject,” whereas Christian culture, which negates sexuality and body, constructs a “repressive moral subject.” Oksala rightly says, “Foucault’s focus is not on the subject as such, but on the conditions which make possible certain experiences and actions: the forms of rationality and the relationships between our thought and our practices in western society. The descriptions of how human beings are turned into subjects are always partial and limited to specific historical contexts.”\textsuperscript{41}

Although both Foucault and Levinas criticize the repressive nature of ontological discourse about human beings, I argue that Foucault’s genealogical critique can supplement Levinas’ phenomenological critique by showing how ontological discourse

\textsuperscript{39} Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow (eds.), \textit{Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics} (London: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 213.

\textsuperscript{40} Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 212.

\textsuperscript{41} Johanna Oksala, \textit{Foucault on Freedom}, p. 108.
functions in specific historical contexts. In particular, Foucault’s genealogical critique can reveal how ontological discourse controls and manipulates human beings through different discursive formations and power-mechanisms. In this way, Foucault’s genealogical critique can offer a strong social and historical perspective that Levinas otherwise lacks.

This does not mean that Levinas’ ethics is not critical. Levinas’ phenomenology simply shows us the metaphysical violence of ontology. But it fails to reveal the social conditions of violent ontology. This prevents Levinas’ ethics from becoming a critical social and cultural theory like Foucault’s. In fact, Foucault’s impact is stronger than Levinas’ in the areas of social science and cultural studies because Foucault’s genealogy clearly shows how different social institutions, such as churches, prisons, hospitals or governments, exert their power towards the other by constructing various kinds of ontological discourses. In contrast, Levinas’ critique, which is restricted by its phenomenological approach, fails to reveal the historical and social condition of ontological violence.

With respect to the role of religion, Foucault and Levinas have different assessments. Foucault’s attitude towards religion, especially Christianity, is negative. In *History of Sexuality*, he argues that Christianity is a disembodied religion, and is thus intrinsically
repressive and anti-body. In contrast, Levinas does not criticize the religious repression of
the body as Foucault does; rather he criticizes Western rationalism as the source of
ontological violence towards the body. Moreover, as was mentioned before, Levinas’
subject, a guilty and self-sacrificing subject who can passionately devote his or her life to
the other in proximity, is basically a religious subject. Levinas’ attitude towards religion
is more positive than Foucault’s because Levinas uses a religious subject to replace the
“hyper-rational subject.”

Here, the religious dimension of Levinas’ subject can “modify” Foucault’s bias
towards religion, particularly Christianity. At the very least, Levinas can show Foucault
that being a religious subject does not necessarily repress the body; rather it can help
constitute an ethical embodied subject, who can have a sensual and fleshly relationship
with the other. In particular, Levinas does not simply associate religion or religious ethics
with a doctrine or a dogmatic teaching as Foucault does; rather religious life, for Levinas,
is about the same spirituality, devotion, passion and responsibility that Foucault endorses
in his critical project. More important, religion, for Levinas, is basically an infinite
relationship between subject and other. Thus, I argue that Levinas’ anti-foundational
approach to religion, which affirms the importance of the infinite other and challenges the
impossibility of the ethical sufficiency of the subject, can modify Foucault’s overly
optimistic humanist approach to ethics.

In sum, both Foucault and Levinas argue that bodily sensation is a necessary condition for being ethical. For Foucault, managing one's desire properly can make one become a righteous governor; and practicing one's bodily life regularly can also cultivate an ethical life. For Levinas, what motivates one to take responsibility for the other is the bodily interruption of the other. Therefore, ethics is fragile and risky, but it is powerful in its fragility and risk. Foucault and Levinas' assertion of bodily sensation can release the ethical potentiality of the bodily sensation repressed by rationalism and Christianity.

Additionally, while both Foucault and Levinas show that one's ethical identity is more or less linguistically constructed, they do not treat the linguistic dimension of the body as the only dimension of the body and reduce it to a purely linguistic construction. Instead, they affirm the material and sensational dimension of the body. In particular, the later Foucault fully recognizes the autonomy of the embodied self. As Hoy says, "he (Foucault) does not ignore the role of individual agency in the social construction of subjectivity. Social beings are not zombies who have no awareness and agency in their formation. Foucault should therefore not be called an advocate of the 'social construction' of subjectivity, if that phrase is understood in a mechanistic or deterministic way."42

Levinas and Foucault’s assertion of the physical dimension of the body can show how one’s desire, sensation and embodiment can constitute an ethical and critical self. Their embodied ethics can make a contribution to contemporary body politics, particularly in revealing the weakness of an anti-essentialist body politics that ignores the physical dimension.

D. Foucault and Levinas on Ethical Language and Pedagogy

Foucault and Levinas agree that there is an intimate relation between language and subjectivity. For Foucault, the making of human subjectivity is not possible without discourse. In *Discipline and Punishment*, *History of Sexuality* and *Abnormal*, Foucault argues that the social identity of the subject is discursively constructed, which means the subject’s identity cannot be formed without language. His genealogical critique also reveals how moral discourse controls our thought and action in a subtle way. For instance, Foucault shows how a Christian subject in the sixteenth century is formed by confession, in which the discourse of the priest can transform the confessing subject into a sinful subject: “The domain of the confession is extended and confession tends to be generalized. All, or almost all, of an individual’s life, thought, and action must pass through the filter of confession, if not, of course, as sin, at least as an element relevant for
an examination or analysis now demanded by confession.\textsuperscript{43} Here, Foucault shows that social discourse can control our whole embodied life, including our body, mind and action, through a subtle discursive mechanism.

It is tempting to argue that Foucault holds a “negative view” of language and discourse due to their implicitly repressive nature. In fact, in some social science disciplines, such as cultural studies, Foucault is regarded as a critical master of discourse, and his genealogical critique as a critical methodology for unmasking different kinds of repressive racial-, sexual- or class-biased discourses. While I agree that Foucault’s attitude towards discourse and language is sceptical to certain degree, this does not mean that he completely rejects the positive role of language and discourse. Rather, he rejects the unjust use of language that manipulates and represses the subject through different institutions and apparatuses. Indeed, Foucault welcomes a less coercive language or discourse, one that not only respects the freedom and autonomy of the subject but also helps to nurture a truth-speaking ethical subject.

The later Foucault affirms an ethics of speaking truthfully (\textit{parrhēsia}), in which the subject learns to speak truthfully and authentically to authority. According to the teachings of Greek ethics, the officers have to learn not to use slippery words of rhetoric

\textsuperscript{43} Michel Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punishment}, p. 177.
that distort the truth. Since truth-speaking cultivates an ethics of governing that manages
the other righteously, it is not simply a technique, but a virtue that stems from one’s
virtuous formation. *Parrhēsia* is the act of telling all (frankness and open-heartedness)
without fear; it is righteous speech to political authority. That is to say, the use of
language is strongly related to social justice. Of course, for Foucault, it is also relevant to
today’s public life. He argues that affirming the virtue of *parrhēsia* can respond to the
crisis of truth-telling in today’s democratic institutions.44 The ethical subject who can
speak truthfully is also a righteous and truthful citizen.

Furthermore, while Foucault charges that the superior priest manipulates the inferior
believer through confession and mentorship, he does not reject all sorts of mentorship or
discursive pedagogy. Interestingly, the later Foucault appreciates Greek mentorship,
which is primarily concerned with the student’s life, not the teacher’s. For Foucault, as
for the Greeks, the master is the one who teaches the student (the other) to take care of
his or her bodily life. Since care of the self, for the Greeks, is something that always
involves a relationship to someone else who is the master, one cannot care for oneself
without the presence of the master. Foucault says the master’s position is defined by what
he or she cares about. Unlike the doctor, he or she does not simply tend to the physical

condition of the body; unlike the teacher, he or she does not simply adopt certain attitudes towards the students. The master is a person who cares for the subject’s care for himself or herself, and who finds in his or her love for a disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple’s self-care.

More important, Foucault says, unlike Christian confession, in Greek mentorship the tie with the master is “circumstantial” and “provisional,” and it “tends towards the autonomy of the directed.”45 Under this condition, Foucault says, “One can understand that the necessity for exploring oneself in exhaustive depth does not present itself. It is not indispensable to say everything about oneself, to reveal one’s least secrets, so that the master may exert complete power over one. The exhaustive and continual presentation of oneself under the eyes of all-powerful director is not an essential feature in this technique of direction.”46 Foucault privileges Greek mentorship over Christian mentorship because the former can respect the autonomy of the student, while the latter only treats mentorship as a technique of manipulation.

In other words, Greek mentorship is about practicing an ethics of the other, in which the mentor primarily considers the other’s interest (the student), not the mentor’s interest.

45 Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self”, p. 164.
46 Michel Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self”, p. 164.
More important, Greek mentorship, as a discursive pedagogy, enables the student to learn to love and care for his or her life, rather than conforming to any universal social norms at which Christian confession aims. That is to say, Greek mentorship generates a less repressive and manipulative language than the Christian Church. For Foucault, Greek mentorship’s language, which respects the other’s life and cares for the interest of the other, is an “other-centered language,” while Christian confession’s language, which aims at controlling the other’s behavior in order to maintain the church’s status quo, is a “self-centered language.”

Moreover, ethical language, for Foucault, is language that cultivates embodied communication. Greek mentorship’s language is ethical because it not only respects the embodied life of the student but also cultivates a vivid embodied communication between master and student. It is communication about life. In contrast, Christian confession’s language is unethical because it simply generates a disembodied command and order that helps the mentor (the priest) to control the student’s life regardless of the student’s bodily need. This not only fails to help life flourish, but negates it.

Thus, for Foucault, language or discourse is not necessarily manipulative or unethical; but there is an ethical way of speaking that makes ethical communication possible. Foucault says that ethical speech is not only determined by the speech’s content,
but by the subject’s life-content. One can speak truthfully before the authority because one can overcome one’s fear and be brave after conducting different bodily exercises. It is bodily exercises, which build up the subject’s virtuous character, that allow the subject speak to truthfully and ethically. It is not the language per se that makes the subject courageous. Foucault’s ethical language is an embodied language; its ethical character stems from one’s virtuous life. It is the subject’s virtuous body that turns language into an ethical discourse.

Like Foucault, Levinas claims that language is a constitutive medium in which the subject can nurture an ethical relationship with the other. Levinas is also skeptical of the manipulative and legalistic character of languages, particularly instrumental language, namely, the said. For Levinas, the said is a systematic form of language that aims at conceptualizing and reducing the other to an object. It is an unethical form of language. The said is always associated with “the linguistic system” and “ontology.” In particular, “essence fills the said.”47 The said encompasses all discourses or narratives in which beings and essences are identified. The problem of the said is its disembodied nature, which does not demand that the speaking subject discloses his or her bodily life while speaking to the other. Since the speaking subject needs to keep a detached and safe

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47 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 9.
distance from the other, the other is always a “silent other” in such disembodied language.

As a result, the subject generates an ontological violence toward the other and neglects the suffering voice of the other.

Levinas does not completely “reject” language even though it has a manipulative tendency. Instead, he privileges the saying over the said because the former is embodied discourse that commands the subject to be exposed to the other in his or her bodily life. The saying is bodily communication because one needs to respond to the suffering other with one’s body. It is not a safe communication, but is “risky.” Since the saying “opens me to the other before saying what is said,” it is not simply a casual communication or dialogue. Rather, it is a risk-taking communication that requires the subject to abandon all “shelter” when facing the other. The saying occurs “in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability.” In other words, Levinas views the saying not as an information exchange, but an exposure of the vulnerable subject to the other. The saying approaches the other by breaking through the noema of intentionality, turning it inside out. The subject in saying approaches a neighbor in expressing itself, in being expelled. More

49 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 48.
50 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being, p. 48.
important, the subject of saying does not give signs; it “becomes a sign, turns into an
allegiance.”\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, the saying is an embodied language because the speaking subject’s body
becomes a sign. The subject does not need a disembodied linguistic system to express his
or her ethical concern towards the other; rather his or her exposure to the other carries the
meaning of care. It is the body, not the grammar or symbol, which signifies the meaning
of the ethical in the saying.

Both Foucault and Levinas argue that language can become a manipulative “tool” to
repress and manipulate the other. For Foucault, Christian and rational discourse are such
instrumental languages because they transform the other and the subject into “objects.”
For Levinas, the problem of the said is that its systematic and conceptual character
reduces the other to a “conceptual object” for the sake of apprehension. Both Foucault
and Levinas also argue that instrumental language is “self-centered” and simply concerns
the subject’s interest while denying the other’s. For Foucault, Christian discourse is used
to sustain the status quo of the church irrespective of the life and freedom of the other. In
Levinas’ case, the said enables the subject to turn the other into an object of knowledge
that simply fulfills the metaphysical desire of the subject.

\textsuperscript{51} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 49.
Both Foucault and Levinas also argue that the problem of instrumental language is its disembodied nature. Both Christian and rational discourse, for Foucault, negate the subject’s body and turn the body into an object of control. For Levinas, the said, which does not require the subject to disclose his or her bodily life to the other, turns communication into “safe,” “calculative” and “manipulative” disembodied communication. Both Foucault and Levinas suggest that ethical communication must be embodied. The body and the bodily life are a necessary condition for speaking ethically. For Foucault, ethical language is related to the subject’s ethical bodily life; for Levinas, ethical saying is related to the subject’s bodily exposure.

Interestingly, ethical speech, for Foucault and Levinas, is “risk-taking speech.” In Foucault’s case, speaking truthfully to the political authority is risky since it might subvert the status quo or the interest of the governor. For Levinas, the saying is a bodily exposure, which demands abandonment of one’s shelter in communication and can bring about a traumatic experience. Thus, the saying is risky since the subject becomes fragile and defenseless in ethical speech.

In addition, both Levinas and Foucault see ethical speech as involving responsibility, as being concerned with speaking responsibly for the other. First, both of them privilege an embodied dialogue over a disembodied monologue. For Levinas, the saying is an
inter-corporeal communication between subject and other, which is not a “chat” but a “life-exposure.” For Foucault, the ethics of speaking truthfully either requires the officer to speak fearlessly to the governor or demands the mentor to speak sincerely for his or her students’ bodily life. For both Foucault and Levinas, the speaking subject must speak freely, nakedly, frankly and fearlessly to the other in order to be authentic. In particular, their notion of ethical speech demands that the speaking subject gets involved with the other’s life-world so as to respond seriously to the other’s needs.

Both Foucault and Levinas believe that ethical speech has to be expressed through an embodied speech-act, not through appeals to a disembodied moral norm or law. That is to say, the bodily life of the speaking subject is a “medium” or “vehicle” for the demonstration of the true meaning of ethics. The ethical subject has to demonstrate to the other the true meaning of ethics in his or her daily bodily life. Thus, to a certain extent, the ethical identity of the subject is constructed and determined by what he or she says. However, while Foucault and Levinas affirm the constructive and discursive nature of the human identity, their assertion of the linguistic dimension of human identity does not reduce the lived body to style or sign. Their notion of the body integrates the physical dimension with the linguistic dimension of the body.

Of course, some differences remain between Foucault and Levinas’ understanding of
ethical language. First, their critique of the problematic nature of language rests on
different grounds. Foucault's critique of rational and religious discourse is genealogical,
while Levinas' critique of the totalizing nature of the said is phenomenological. Further,
each points to different problems with disembodied instrumental or technical language.
Foucault shows that the universal nature of religious and rational discourses represses the
singularity of the other, whereas Levinas shows how totalizing ontological discourse
domesticates the infinitude and transcendence of the other. In other words, Levinas
defends the other's transcendence, while Foucault does not.

Furthermore, unlike Foucault, Levinas does not reject religious discourse as long as
it is not a totalizing theological discourse that domesticates the other and God. Samuel
Moyn writes, "Levinas showed himself aware of the danger that his discourse might seem
theological; in response he overtly and repeatedly insisted that it is not."52 While I agree
that Levinas' ethical language rejects dogmatic theological content, this does not mean
that he denies the religious implications or the religiosity of the ethical saying. For
Levinas, speaking responsibly to the other in the saying is a religious response to God.

As mentioned before, we can regard Levinas' embodied subject as a religious
subject who passionately and faithfully devotes his or her life to the other. The subject's

52 Samuel Moyn, Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics (Ithaca and
ethical act towards the other is a religious sacrifice. Furthermore, the obligation of responsibility is not possible without associating it with God’s ethical command: “To see or to know the face is already to deface the other. The face in its nudity is the weakness of a unique being exposed to death, but at the same time the enunciation of an imperative which obliges me not to let it alone. This obligation is the first word of God. For me, theology begins in the face of neighbor. The divinity of God is played out in the human. God descends in the ‘face’ of the other. To recognize God is to hear his commandment ‘thou shalt not kill,’ which is not only a prohibition against murder, but a call to an incessant responsibility with regard to the other.” For Levinas, the saying, as an ethical commandment that stems from God’s commandment, is an irresistible religious power. Moreover, since the subject’s intentionality also has a transcendent religious dimension that can connect to God’s commandment, the subject cannot easily reject the ethical command. Thus, as Purcell says, for Levinas, the interiority of the subject “is already breached by a transcendent alterity, which is the constant provocation of the subject as ethical.”

For Levinas, the saying per se is religious and sacred discourse through which God can approach and command human beings. Such religious saying transmits God’s

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53 Jill Robbins (ed.), *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 236
commandment through the transcendent other to the subject. In other words, the saying is an embodied religious discourse. Interestingly, although the subject passively receives the ethical command (the subject simply listens to what God commands to him or her through the other in the saying), the subject’s ethical being is actualized in the passive reception of the command. For Levinas, if one rejects the ethical command, then one is against one’s being. That is to say, while the other eliminates the subject’s freedom or autonomy in the saying, the passivity of the subject constitutes the subject as an authentic ethical subject.

Unlike Levinas’ conditional affirmation of the religiosity of language (it is a conditional affirmation because Levinas does not welcome a disembodied religious discourse, which reduces God and other to law), Foucault rejects all religious discourses, which he thinks are intrinsically repressive, especially Christian confessional discourse. He argues that theological or religious discourse not only represses the life of the other but also fails to transform one into an authentic ethical subject. Religious discourse, for Foucault, generates a merely passive subject, but not an active subject.

In fact, the theological discourse that Foucault criticizes is simply the disembodied theological discourse that Levinas also criticizes. But Levinas shows that there is another embodied religious discourse that respects the singularity of the individual human being
and helps the subject become an authentic ethical being. Levinas further argues that the
constitution of a truly ethical embodied subject is not possible without the saying, which
is an ethical language that not only limits the subject’s freedom but also makes the
subject passive. In this way, Levinas can show Foucault that religious discourse, which
limits the subject’s freedom, is not intrinsically against life; rather it can be life
promoting.

In addition to their different assessments of the religious dimension of language,
Foucault and Levinas also have different perspectives on the pedagogical dimension of
language. Although Foucault criticizes the repressive nature of scientific and Christian
discourses, this does not mean that he completely rejects the pedagogical function of such
language. In fact, according to Foucault, an ethical life is not possible if it ignores any
truth-seeking activities. He prefers Greek spirituality because it requires the
transformation of one’s bodily life in one’s truth-seeking dialogue. Foucault does not
negate the pedagogical and cognitive dimension of language. What he rejects is
repressive disembodied knowledge-transmission and production that does not respect the
subject’s autonomy or demand the subject’s self-transformation. Foucault is concerned
with how we can integrate language, knowledge and body so as to generate an “embodied
subjective truth,” not a “disembodied objective truth.”
Foucault asserts the practical and pedagogical dimension of language. In particular, inspired by Greek care of the self, Foucault is concerned with the pedagogical functions of ethical language in the realm of governance, such as in the equipping the governor or officer to speak truthfully and act righteously. The later Foucault is more concerned with the practical/pedagogical use of ethical language than with exploring a metaphysical ground for ethical language. Since Foucault treats language as an essential condition for cultivating one’s virtuous character, he can fully affirm the pedagogical value of ethical language, through which students learn how to master their life from their mentors. Foucault believes that the spirit of ancient Greek dialogical mentorship liberates students from ignorance through teaching, training, and modeling. The mentors not only enlighten the students with knowledge but also show the students the way of being ethical.

Thus, Foucault argues that the mentor is not the master of memory or someone who knows what the other does not know. Rather the mentor is an effective agency for producing effects within the individual’s reform. The mentor is the mediator in the individual’s relationship to one’s constitution as a subject. For instance, in Seneca, the mentor is asked to help the students not to be stultitia who have muddled minds that

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55 Of course, the earlier Foucault is more interested in exploring the metaphysical nature of discourse and language. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

56 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 130.
allow all the representations from the outside world to enter their minds. The intervention of the mentor is meant to help the students avoid confusion by different representations; thus mentorship needs language to unmask the illusion of representations. Although the use of language in mentorship has an instrumental function, it is still acceptable for Foucault since it can achieve a self-concern that can promote, not repress, life. Coelen rightly says that for Foucault, “the pedagogy of the master-servant relationship of antiquity as instructions for achieving self-concern can hence be seen as a way of avoiding disciplinary methods and coercion to confess.”\textsuperscript{57} In other words, the Greeks’ pedagogical use of language does not control the students through a specific curriculum; rather it arouses one’s self-concern towards one’s bodily life so that one uses one’s desire and power properly. Thus, Coelen says, educating the student to have concern for the self, for Foucault, is a “pedagogic, ethical and ontological condition for being a ‘good (responsible) governor’ .... It is constituted as conscious dealing rather than just a general disposition.”\textsuperscript{58}

For Levinas, the use of language aims at transmitting the other’s ethical command to the subject, rather than generating any practical or theoretical knowledge for the subject.


\textsuperscript{58} Thomas Coelen, “Pedagogy and Self-Concern in Master-Student Relationships in Antiquity,” p. 47.
He is more concerned with the metaphysical than the practical, pedagogical and political
dimension of ethical language. Of course, Levinas’ ethical saying has a political
implication. For instance, it can “deconstruct” any violent political system that stems
from the said, such as Nazism. But his ethics mainly deals with the ethical rather than the
practical ground of language. Unlike Foucault, Levinas does not primarily view ethical
language as a medium of pedagogy. Instead, he argues that the saying is primarily used to
transmit “the other’s moral urge” and “the subject’s ethical response.” What is
communicated through the saying is not a material sign or symbol, but a bodily signal,
such as pain, suffering and hunger. The other commands the subject with his or her
fragile body and the subject responds to the other with his or her vulnerable bodily life as
well. Language, for Levinas, is not primarily meant for transmitting knowledge, but for
transmitting intersubjective ethical sensation.

Furthermore, Levinas’ saying, as an anti-representational language, hardly serves as
a traditional pedagogical language that simply transmits knowledge. For Levinas, the
other only leaves a trace of a sign, not any moral statement, to the subject through the
saying. What signifies in the saying is simply a “fleshy testimony” or an “embodied
witness” that is prior to any apperception. Levinas regards the witness of the other as the
trace, which cannot be effaced by the said: “the witness is not reducible to the
relationship that leads from an index to the indicated. That would make it a disclosure and a thematization. It is the bottomless passivity of responsibility, and thus, sincerity. It is the meaning of language, before language scatters into words, into themes equal to the words and dissimulating in the said the openness of the saying exposed like a bleeding wound. But the trace of the witness given, the sincerity or glory, is not effaced even in its said.\textsuperscript{59} For Levinas, the bodily witness is a language of witness, not a conceptual language structured by grammar or system (the said). Although the meaning of witness can be metaphorically imagined as “a bleeding wound,” such a metaphor cannot exhaustively grasp what witness is. Thus, Levinas regards the witness as only a trace of witness. Unlike Foucault, Levinas does not view ethical language as primarily a pedagogical language since he does not allow the saying to be transformed into the said.

Because both Foucault’s dialogue and Levinas’ saying assume intersubjective bodily communication, one may ask whether their models share some commonalities. While I agree that both prefer an embodied communication to a disembodied communication or an egoist monologue, they understand the notion of communication differently, in three respects.

First, for the Greeks, as for Foucault, dialogue presumes a symmetrical relationship

\textsuperscript{59} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 151.
between the subject and the other. Although the mentor will primarily take care of the 
student’s interest, their relationship is a symmetrical relationship where the student (the 
other) does not have a transcendent status. In contrast, Levinas’ saying presumes an 
asymmetrical distance between subject and other, where the other is always beyond the 
subject.

Second, dialogue, for Foucault, does not transmit the ethical urge or command; rather it aims at transmitting different virtuous teachings and exercises for the sake of 
cultivating an ethical subject. With the aid of a mentor, the student can acquire 
knowledge about life and body, which is already embedded in their ordinary life and 
traditional culture. Indeed, Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, regard the mentor as a 
midwife. In dialogue, the mentors not only guide the students to discover knowledge for 
themselves, but also bring out the self-knowledge that is already embedded in the 
students’ life. As Foucault says, for the Greeks, pedagogy is “the transmission of a truth 
whose function is to endow any subject whatever with aptitudes, capabilities, knowledges, 
and so on, that he did not possess and that he should possess at the end of the pedagogical 
relationship.”60

But Levinas’ saying does not bring out knowledge that is already embedded in the 

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60 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 407.
subject’s mind; rather it brings the subject a “knowledge” that he or she never grasps and contains. As Todd rightly argues, for Levinas, the saying is “to bring more than I contain.” Levinas does not completely reject the pedagogical dimension of the saying, but insists what one can “learn” from the other through the saying is not something that is already embedded in one’s mind, but something that is antithetical to one’s mind. Levinas’ saying aims at interrupting the subject’s life-world through an “other’s knowledge,” which is beyond the subject’s expectation and apprehension. In contrast, Greek dialogue aims at illuminating and enlightening the subject’s mind with a knowledge that is already embedded in the subject’s mind. As Todd comments on Greek education, “in the Socratic view, learning supposedly happens almost in spite of the teacher. It is still the skill of the teacher to elicit that which is already inside the subject, not the social encounter per se that matters. The maieutic method erases the significance of the Other and claims that learning is a recovery contained within the I, rather than a disruption of the I provoked by the Other in a moment of sociality.”

Third, Greek dialogical education is self-initiated education that encourages one to actively participate in dialogue with one’s mentor so that one can learn how to take care of oneself. One is also asked to look for a good mentor by oneself. That is to say, the

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61 Sharon Todd, *Learning from the Other*, p. 30.
autonomy and self-determination of the ethical subject serve as an important condition for a successful dialogue/education. But Levinas’ saying is not a “self-initiated dialogue.” Rather, it is an “other-initiated communication.” For Levinas, the face of the other speaks first; the face is a living presence; it is expression. In other words, it is the other who looks for and speaks to the subject first, not vice versa. The other is not a dialogue mentor who can be freely invited or chosen by the subject. Rather it is the other who initiates the communication. Moreover, it is a sensual communication that commands the subject to respond, rather than a rational dialogue that encourages the subject to ask. Thus, the subject is totally subordinated to the other in the saying. Since Levinas does not believe that one can become ethical by oneself, he rejects the subject’s commitment and determination in relation to being ethical. One is totally passive before the other. For Levinas, the passivity and poverty of the ethical subjects serve as an important condition in an ethical communication.

Although Foucault and Levinas view the nature of ethical language and communication differently, their positions illuminate each other nonetheless. We can regard Levinas’ saying as a “vehicle of ethical urge” and Foucault’s dialogue as a “vehicle of ethical cultivation.” They demonstrate two dimensions or functions of ethical

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63 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 66.
language that are important in constituting an ethical life. A truly ethical language must include both of these functions: transmitting ethical command and cultivating ethical value. How can Levinas' anti-representational saying complement Foucault's representational dialogue?

First, Levinas' saying can enable Foucault's subject to be sensitive to the suffering voice of the other. Levinas' saying is not disembodied speech; rather it is an embodied speech-act that reveals the other's suffering testimony. As mentioned before, Foucault views dialogue as a way of cultivating one's ethical character, enabling one to take care of oneself through managing one's bodily life. But Foucault's pedagogical notion of dialogue fails to make the subject fully aware of the suffering situation of the other, despite the context of political governing or mentorship. Both Foucault and ancient Greek philosophers view ethical communication as either a subject's self-initiated communication or a reciprocal communication without taking into account the other-initiated communication that Levinas suggests.

In contrast, Levinas shows that other-initiated ethical communication, which reveals the suffering voice of the other, can fight against an egoist monologue or dialogue. Such an other-initiated communication can become the most basic ground of all communication. Thus, while Levinas is not primarily concerned with the practical use of
ethical communication, he can show us the most important condition of any
communication.

Since Foucault is mainly concerned with the practical rather than the metaphysical
ground of ethical language, he fails to fully actualize the ethical potentiality of language,
which makes the ethical subject possible. Because Foucault's dialogue is
"subject-initiated communication," and not "other-initiated," the egoist subject can easily
repress or deny the other's suffering voice and testimony. According to Foucault, the
subject's ethical formation is never primarily driven by the suffering voice of the other,
but by the mentor's teachings or bodily exercises. For instance, when one practices the
ethics of speaking truthfully, one is driven by one's courageous character cultivated
through the bodily practices, not by the suffering voice of the other. Because listening to
the other is not the starting point in Foucault's self-initiated dialogue, Foucault's subject
does not need to listen to the other before speaking, even though the technique of the self
does include the practice of listening. Foucault's self-initiated dialogue cannot guarantee
that the care of the self will lead to the care of the other, or that the egoist self will treat
the other in a non-egoist way, for the suffering voice of the other never serves as a
normative testimony or narrative that can limit the egoist subject.

Levinas' saying can enable Foucault's subject to be sensitive to the suffering voice
of the other through the transformation of the ethical subject into a listener, rather than a speaker. One might wonder, however, whether Foucault, as a Nietzsche’s follower, would accept a subject who mourns for the other’s suffering, for Nietzsche regards empathy as a characteristic of slave morality. While I agree that Nietzsche’s ethics profoundly inspires Foucault’s ethics, this does not mean that Foucault unconditionally accepts what Nietzsche says about morality. From some of Foucault’s writings on Nietzsche, e.g., “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” and “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” we may see that what inspires Foucault is not Nietzsche’s account of slave morality, but his genealogical critique of the origin of morality and his anti-foundational understanding of interpretation.

Moreover, the late Foucault’s aesthetics of existence mainly stems from Nietzsche’s notion of the art of living, not from his account of slave morality. A hostile and cynical “gesture” of Nietzsche’s ethics towards the weak people does not capture Foucault’s mind. As Bernauer and Mahon say, “Foucault’s ethics, then, is not Nietzsche’s ‘beyond good and evil’ but is beyond life and death. Nor does it constitute a Nietzschean leap beyond common morality into a splendid isolation cut off from ethical and political solidarity. Foucault committed himself to the cause of human rights, to the transformation of the plight of prisoners, mental patients, and other victims in both his theory and his
Indeed, some of the late Foucault’s political engagements also showed his great compassion towards those who suffered. In a short article titled “Confronting Governments: Human Rights,” Foucault promoted an international citizenship and said: “It is a duty of this international citizenship to always bring the testimony of people’s suffering to the eyes and ears of governments, suffering for which it’s untrue that they are not responsible. The suffering of men must never be a silent residue of policy. It grounds an absolute right to stand up and speak to those who hold power.”

Thus, I believe that Foucault’s subject has a potentiality to be transformed into a listener who listens to those who suffer. In the saying, the other’s embodied witness can command Foucault’s subject to be a humble listener so as to limit the egoist mentality of the subject.

More important, Levinas’ saying, which leaves “room” for the “interruption of the suffering other,” can turn Foucault’s dialogue into an open-ended dialogue. Since Foucault treats dialogue as the transmission of ethical knowledge, it is easy to turn the dialogical content into the said, a dogmatic content that does not leave room for the other’s interruption. Since the experience or knowledge that the other brings to the

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subject in the saying is beyond the subject’s understanding, the saying makes communication open to the infinite other. Levinas’ saying can show Foucault that a truly ethical dialogue definitely needs the other’s interruption so as to keep the dialogue open to the infinite other. Of course, this does not mean that Foucault’s dialogue can simply be identified with Levinas’ saying. Because both of their communicative models are based on intersubjective embodied communication, however, Foucault can nevertheless learn from Levinas’ insight concerning open and non-dogmatic communication.

Second, with respect to the pedagogical function of language, Foucault can show Levinas how care of self and pedagogy can help the ethical subject to be aware of his or her egoist tendency towards the other. Foucault argues that if we can properly care for ourselves under the guidance of a mentor or pedagogy, we can care for the life of the other through limiting our own egoist mentality. For him, the Greek notion of care of self is about governing the other through embodied virtuous practices.66 Care of the self always goes through the relationship to someone else who is the master. One cannot care for the self without the presence of the master. According to Foucault, “the master is the person who cares about the subject’s care for himself, and who finds in his love for his

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disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple’s care for himself. 

In other words, care of self is practice of self-awareness in which one learns to examine one’s interior life or inner struggle deeply with the aid of mentor. Care of self is about a practice of self-love.

In fact, both Foucault and Levinas agree that one’s ethical life is more or less determined by one’s desire. For Foucault, care of the self is important because the appropriate desire-management can nurture a righteous form of ethical (political) life. For Levinas, desire for enjoyment could generate an indifferent attitude towards the other, and turn one into an unethical being. If Foucault’s care of the self aims at eliminating an excessive self-indulgence, which can generate an unethical attitude towards the other, then he shares the same critical concern with Levinas’ critique of egoism and enjoyment. Foucault’s care of the self enables the Levinas’ subject to be aware of the unethical consequence of the excessive use of desire that might corrupt one’s ability to welcome the other. Although care of the self, for Levinas, is never a sufficient condition of being ethical, it could prepare the Levinasian subject to wait for the coming of the other through examining one’s interior life or struggle towards one’s egoist mentality.

Would Levinas’ other-initiated ethics accept the management of one’s desire as a

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67 Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, p. 59.
preparation for being ethical? Would Levinas allow one to become ethical through one’s effort? Since Levinas views the subject as totally passive in relation to being ethical, one cannot become ethical by oneself through one’s own effort. If Levinas would consider the technique of the self as part of his ethical project, then Levinas’ subject per se would have an ethical potentiality that can prepare the subject to “welcome” the other. It is because Foucault’s technique of the self presumes that one does have an ethical potentiality to care for the other that one can liberate one’s ethical potentiality through practices.

This, however, raises a significant issue. Unless the passive Levinasian subject has an ethical potentiality to welcome or desire the other, it is difficult to integrate the technique of the self into Levinas’ ethics. However, when we look at the earlier writings of Levinas, such as Totality and Infinity, we find that the earlier Levinas does not view the subject as totally passive; rather he believes that the subject can have an ethical potentiality to welcome or desire the other. The later Levinas, who emphasizes the “radical passivity” of the subject, cannot continue his earlier recognition of the ethical potentiality of the ambiguous bodily sensation.

In Totality and Infinity Levinas argues that the ambiguous nature of sensibility has an ethical dimension that relates the subject to the other. Lingis says that two kinds of sensibility are mentioned in Totality and Infinity: “a sensibility for the elements and the
things of the world, sensuality, which is appropriation and self-appropriation, and a
sensibility for the face of another, which is expropriation.\textsuperscript{68} For Levinas, sensation is
ambiguous because it has two dimensions: the self-centered dimension and the
other-centered dimension. In other words, the subject is not simply a separated or isolated
subject; rather he or she also longs for an intimate relationship with the other.

But Levinas rarely mentions the ethical ambiguity of the subject in \textit{Otherwise than
Being}; he only highlights the subject’s egoist sensation and the subject’s passivity. As
Hofmeyr says, the earlier Levinas attempts to “describe the converted ethical subject’s
continuing struggle against an inherently egoist nature. However, in light of his later
works (\textit{Otherwise than Being}) this explanation becomes increasingly implausible.”\textsuperscript{69} In
particular, Hofmeyr argues that in \textit{Totality and Infinity}, Levinas shows that the
double-sidedness of desire as “separation \textit{and} relation is an indication of the fact that
human existence is a two-dimensional reality: as separated individuals, we are
independent and egocentric...as transcending towards the Other.”\textsuperscript{70} In \textit{Totality and
Infinity}, Levinas states: “Before defining man as the animal that can commit suicide it is
necessary to define man as capable of living for the Other and of \textit{being} on the basis of the

\textsuperscript{69} Benda Hofmeyr, \textit{Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas}, p. 267
Other who is exterior to him." Although enjoyment might lead to egoism, it also presupposes "the welcoming of the Other." And enjoyment and sensibility "are necessary for the idea of Infinity, the relation with the Other which opens forth from the separated and finite being." It is because the subject in enjoyment experiences loneliness, lack and "hunger" that such experiences trigger his or her desire for the other: "In enjoyment I am absolutely for myself. Egoist without reference to the Other, I am alone without solitude, innocently egoist and alone. Not against the Others, not 'as for me...' but entirely deaf to the Other, outside of all communication and all refusal to communicate—without ears, like a hungry stomach."74

However, for Levinas, the hungry and insecure subject75 who separates from the other is not hopeless, for the interiority of the subject is open to exteriority: "In the separated being the door to the outside must hence be at the same time open and closed. The closedness of the separated being must be ambiguous enough for ... the interiority necessary to the idea of infinity to remain real and not apparent only, for the destiny of the interior being to be pursued in an egoist atheism refuted by nothing exterior..."76

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71 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 149.  
72 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 146.  
74 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 134.  
75 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 150.  
subject’s interiority\textsuperscript{77} (egoism, enjoyment, sensibility) can enable the subject to “await and welcome the revelation of transcendence.”\textsuperscript{78} In fact, Levinas presumes that the separation is a necessary condition for welcoming the infinite other: “the idea of infinity, revealed in the face, does not only require a separated being; the light of the face is necessary for separation.”\textsuperscript{79} It is the subject’s “hungry stomach” that opens up a dimension to welcome the intervention of the other.

In addition, the intervention of the other that Levinas describes in \textit{Totality and Infinity} differs from the one described in \textit{Otherwise than Being}. In \textit{Totality and Infinity}, Levinas regards the intervention of the other as a “soft and gentle intervention” in which the other “reveals himself in his alterity not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness.”\textsuperscript{80} It “provokes separation not by some force of opposition and dialectical evocation, but by the feminine grace of its radiance.”\textsuperscript{81} By contrast, in \textit{Otherwise than Being}, Levinas regards the intervention of the other as not a “gentle intervention”; rather it is a “harsh strike”\textsuperscript{82} towards the subject that kidnaps the subject as “hostage.” In the other words, Levinas understands the other’s intervention

\textsuperscript{77} Levinas defines interiority as a radical separation, which in on way deprives the subject from contact with the other.
\textsuperscript{78} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{79} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{80} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{81} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{82} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Otherwise than Being}, p. 88.
differently in his different stages. In particular, the earlier Levinas shows that the other
for the subject is not just a "interrupting other," who weakens the subject; rather he or she
could be a "caring other," who strengthens the subject.

The earlier Levinas shows that one is not completely dominated by one’s egoist
desire; rather one’s fear of nothingness and one’s insecurity and separation can serve as a
condition for welcoming the other. As Levinas says, "for my position as I consists in
being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for
myself."\textsuperscript{83} While Levinas believes that one’s egoist desire always represses one’s
compassion towards the other, he does not deny one’s ethical potentiality towards the
other (one’s desire to have an affective relationship with the other).

Thus, Hofmeyr rightly argues, Levinas’ affirmation of the subject’s enjoyment as a
condition of welcoming the other functions "analogously to Foucault’s aesthetic
self-formation—an auto-affection which is a necessary condition for the possibility of
being affected by the other."\textsuperscript{84} Of course, this does not mean that Levinas and Foucault
have a similar attitude towards the ethical condition of self-love. Levinas’ affirmation of
enjoyment is simply a "negative affirmation," which means one finds one’s poverty,
insecurity, lack and loneliness (the negative experience) in self-love/egoism so that one

\textsuperscript{83} Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{84} Benda Hofmeyr, \textit{Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas}, p. 197.
discovers one's hunger desire for the love of the other. In contrast, Foucault's affirmation of self-love is a “positive affirmation,” which means one kindly loves oneself (the positive experience) so that one can love the other in the same manner. For Levinas, it is the negative self-love experiences that motivate one to welcome the other; for Foucault, it is the positive self-love experiences that motivate one to love the other.

In sum, Foucault and Levinas have shown us two complementary views of ethical language: a “vehicle of ethical urge” (Levinas) and a “vehicle of ethical cultivation” (Foucault). These two dimensions are necessary for constituting an ethical communication. What Levinas' saying offers to the Foucault's subject is to make him or her more sensitive to the suffering voice of the other so as to turn him or her from a pleasure-seeking subject into an empathetic subject.

With respect to the pedagogical use of language, Levinas might accept Foucault's care of the self, a pedagogical exercise of one's bodily life, as a preparation for the subject to welcome the other. But Levinas would regard it as a kind of practice that simply enables one to be aware of one's self-limitation, lack, separation, fragility and loneliness as generated by an interior enjoyment. It would aim at making one discover one's desire or compassion for the other and open up one's interior dimension towards the other. As Hofmeyr says, “before I am confronted by the Other, the process of
self-formation hones me, shapes me into a susceptible state, by my self I become that which the Other can address. “Thus, Levinas’ pedagogy would not necessarily cultivate the ethically sufficient and mature subject that Foucault’s pedagogy asserts; rather it would cultivate a sense of the subject’s humbleness and fragility so as to make the subject aware of his or her egoist tendency.

Thus Foucault’s subject-initiated pedagogy is not antithetical to Levinas’ other-initiated pedagogy. Foucault’s technique of the self can supplement Levinas’ model, which lacks a practical dimension. My suggestion does not deny the importance of the intervention of the other and the passivity of the subject; rather I want to liberate the ethical possibility of the subject that Levinas fails to explore sufficiently after Totality and Infinity.

E. Conclusion

A comprehensive view of the ethical embodied subject emerges from the comparison of Foucault and Levinas’ ethical embodied subject:

1. Both Foucault and Levinas view ethics as having the “relational,” “bodily,” “cognitive,” “aesthetic” and religious” dimensions. Both reject a legalistic notion of morality, and treat ethics as involving an inter-subjective relationship.

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2. In such an ethical embodied subject, the body has “ethical,” “physical,” “historical,” “cultural” and “religious”/“transcendent” dimensions. While Foucault and Levinas affirm the constructive and linguistic nature of the body, they do not reduce the body to text. Rather they show how two bodily sensations (Foucault’s pleasure and Levinas’ pain) actualize the ethical meaning of the body in one’s ethical formation.

3. Both Foucault and Levinas treat bodily sensation as a primordial mode of the ethical subject. While Foucault views pleasure and desire as the primordial mode of the ethical subject, Levinas views pain and suffering as the primordial mode of the ethical subject. But Foucault’s approach needs Levinas’ approach so as to overcome one’s egoism completely.

4. For such an ethical embodied subject, care of self and care of other are two important conditions of being ethical. While Levinas affirms the necessity of care of other in one’s ethical formation, Foucault shows us the importance of care of the self in one’s ethical formation. But Foucault’s approach needs Levinas’ approach so as to ensure that the Foucault’s subject would not treat the other in a violent way; and Levinas’ approach needs Foucault’s approach to account for the self as the condition of possibility for the intervention of the other.

5. For such an ethical embodied subject, language or linguistic communication has the
“manipulative,” “cognitive,” “constructive,” “bodily,” “testifying,” “pedagogical” and “cultivating” dimensions. In particular, both Foucault and Levinas show the necessity of language in one’s ethical formation: language can express the other’s ethical command (Levinas), cultivate righteous political governing (Foucault), and facilitate an inter-subjective ethical communication (Foucault and Levinas).

Having derived a comprehensive notion of the ethical embodied subject from Foucault and Levinas’ notion of the ethical embodied subject, the concluding chapter will show how such a comprehensive notion of ethical embodied subject can inspire contemporary body politics.
Chapter Five. Conclusion: Searching for an Ethical Ground for Body Politics;

Foucault and Levinas' Inspiration

This thesis has argued that Foucault and Levinas view the subject as an ethical embodied subject in which the body is a necessary condition for being ethical. Either training one's body (Foucault) or sensing the other's bodily suffering (Levinas) makes possible an ethical subject who can take responsibility for the other. And ethics, for them, is no longer a disembodied law or rule that simply concerns the conformity of the subject to the social norm; rather it is an embodied ethics that primarily concerns a compassionate and sensual relationship between subject and other. Unless we recognize the importance of the body or bodily sensation, we can never release the ethical potentiality of the body or bodily sensation.

Furthermore, we have seen the main differences between Foucault and Levinas to be as follows. Whereas Foucault believes that “care of the self” (treating oneself properly/righteously) must lead to “care of the other” (treating the other properly/righteously), Levinas believes that “care of the other” is the only way to make the subject ethical and righteous. Foucault’s subject is an aesthetic subject who views taking care of one’s bodily life and stylization of self as the important practice of being ethical; Levinas’ subject is a religious subject who views sacrificing one’s own bodily life
for the other as the only way of being ethical. That is to say, Foucault’s ethical subject is a self-driven ethical subject, whereas Levinas’ subject is an other-driven ethical subject.

Foucault and Levinas view the notion of the other differently. For Foucault, the other has a symmetrical relationship with the subject, whereas for Levinas, the other is a transcendent other who has an asymmetrical relationship with the subject. Their different interpretations of the status of the other lead to different approaches to ethics and ethical subjectivity. In addition, while Foucault and Levinas agree that one’s bodily sensation can subvert various kinds of social or psychological boundaries, they privilege different modes of sensation. For Foucault, bodily pleasure can serve to transgress social boundaries; whereas Levinas affirms bodily pain and suffering that can subvert the subject’s egoist mentality.

Finally, while Foucault and Levinas affirm the constructive and linguistic nature of the body, their approaches to the body do not simply reduce the body to “text” that negates the natural power of the body or reduce the subject to a passive culturally constructed subject. Instead, Levinas shows us how the body per se can yield a subversive and ethical meaning, and Foucault shows us how the subject can become an active ethical subject through speaking truthfully to the authority.

As was mentioned in chapter one, this study of Foucault and Levinas’ ethical
embodied subject aims to see how their comprehensive notions of embodiment can respond to some ethical problems in contemporary body politics. In the following, I shall show how Foucault and Levinas' ethics of body can inspire and modify contemporary body politics so as to offer us a more solid ethical ground on which to fight against various kinds of bodily repression.

As chapter one shows, most social constructivists believe that subverting all social laws in an endless bodily mutation, subversion or deconstruction is the only way to defend one's bodily freedom. They adopt a subversive aesthetic strategy to subvert all dominant understandings of gender and bodily identities. As Shapiro rightly says, the driving force of body politics, a politics of the life world, "is an aesthetic one. The goal is not a moral vision of the right social order but that of the endless quest for creative destruction and construction—to disrupt and transgress the given forms of our identity.... Freedom is the continuing act of subverting this reified world. Not surprisingly, sexual 'normalization' is the central target for this life politics."¹ Thus, most social constructivists treasure an alternative bodily identity that can challenge the supposed naturalness of heterosexuality and actualize the uniqueness of the embodied subject.

However, the social constructionists' body theories do not explicitly address the

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following question: Why must such a stylish identity be “better,” “ethical” or “less repressive” than the less-stylish one? Is subversion good enough for us to construct a “less-repressive” identity? We need to ask: Is bodily transformation an unconditional transformation? Does stylization of the body have ethics? Can stylization of body fully actualize the meaning of the body? Can the natural body per se generate a subversive meaning or power? How can the subversive subject become a responsible and ethical subject? In this final chapter, I shall show how both Foucault and Levinas’ approach to the ethical embodied subject can help to answer the above questions.

At first glance, Foucault’s anti-essentialist approach to the body shares with social constructivists the motif that the body is the “cultural constructed body,” without any pre-given essence and nature. His stylization of self also shares with most social constructivists the argument that only if we can actualize the aesthetic and stylish value of body can we achieve a freedom of life that does not conform to a universal dominant rule or norm. For Foucault and the social constructivists, one can achieve one’s stylish bodily identity only if one transgresses or subverts one’s bodily boundary. Both the social constructivists and Foucault view the conversion or transformation of the body as the starting point for achieving a unique and stylish form of life. To a certain extent, both treasure an aesthetic value of the body and view bodily subversion as an aesthetic
subversion. If Foucault's approach is the same as the social constructivists’ approach, then how can Foucault’s notion of ethical embodied subject improve on the latter?

Where Foucault differs from most of the social constructivists is that Foucault can further show a stylish embodied subject to be not simply a “stylish subject” but an “ethical stylish subject.” First, for Foucault, while stylization of the self needs to transgress or subvert repressive boundaries so as to make possible a subject of liberty, this does not mean that he identifies stylization of body as simply a symbolic or aesthetic subversion of the dominant culture. Instead, stylization of the body, for Foucault, aims at cultivating a unique and free ethical subject who not only takes care of oneself but also takes care of the other. A stylish subject does not simply have a peculiar “bodily figure” or “bodily identity.” Rather it is about a cultivation of the ethical quality of one’s life. For instance, Foucault views a subject who can speak truthfully as a stylish subject, not because he or she has a peculiar bodily identity, but because he or she has a virtue of *parrhēsia*. Thus, stylization of self is not a celebration of an aesthetic style that our consumer culture promotes; rather it is about an ethical formation of one’s subjectivity.

Of course, Foucault also criticizes the manipulative nature of language as social constructivists do. But he does not treat all languages as manipulative language. Rather, he treasures an embodied language that can cultivate one’s ethical embodied identity and
affirms an ethics of speech (parrhēsia) that can cultivate a virtue of speaking freely and honestly. Unlike the social constructivists who view the language in a negative way, Foucault views the language in a comprehensive way.

Second, while Foucault affirms the transgressive power of the body, he does not view stylization of self as an unconditional self-transformation. Transgression, for Foucault, is not simply violation; rather it is a movement between limit and transgression. Transgression is an art for him because the subject needs to learn how to balance or manage properly this movement. Inspired by ancient Greek spirituality, Foucault is aware of the importance of use of pleasure in one’s ethical formation in that one’s proper use of pleasure can lead to a righteous act towards the other, and one’s excessive use of the pleasure can generate violence towards the other. Since he fully recognizes the ethical and unethical natures of bodily pleasure, he highlights the importance of technique of the self through which one learns to regulate one’s desire and power modestly. In other words, stylization of self, for Foucault, is not an unconditional subversive act but a conditional ethical act: he rejects any violent repression of others generated from one’s stylization of self. Therefore, Foucault’s ethical understanding of stylization of self can offer the social constructivists an ethical perspective to reexamine their praxis of bodily subversion.

Of course, as was mentioned before, the problem for Foucault is his celebration of a
self-sufficient ethical formation in that one can become ethical in oneself without this
necessarily demanding the intervention of the other. Foucault is very confident of one’s
potential to be ethical. He believes that the ethical subject has an “in-born ethical urge” or
“conscience” so that one can overcome one’s egoism through care of self. While Foucault
optimistically believes that care of self can lead to care of the other, he cannot warrant
that such a self-sufficient ethical formation will not generate violent acts towards the
other. Levinas, who treats the irresistible intervention of the other as an essential way to
limit one’s egoism, can modify Foucault’s optimistic approach to stylization of self. In
fact, this modification is also valid for social constructivists because they are not aware of
one’s egoist tendency, which could generate a violent act towards the others, in one’s
bodily subversion. Thus, Levinas, who affirms the priority of the other as a way to limit
one’s freedom, can restrict the egoist tendency of the social constructivists’ bodily
transformation.2

With respect to the meaning of the body, Levinas’ saying can further inspire the
social constructivists. For the social constructivists, there is no pre-cultural body: every
dimension of the body, including the biological dimension of body, is culturally

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2 Perhaps one could question whether the social constructivists would accept Levinas’ approach to the
subject, since his approach, which limits the freedom of the subject, is contrary to the liberation agenda
of contemporary body politics. But Butler’s recent affirmation of the importance of Levinas’ ethics of
the other in one’s ethical formation shows that Levinas’ ethics can be compatible with the social
constructivists’ liberation agenda. See Judith Butler, Giving an Account of Oneself (New York: Fordham
University Press, 2005).
constructed. Thus, social constructivists’ subversive strategy is to generate a peculiar but subversive cultural meaning of the body, one which challenges the dominant meaning of the body. For instance, Butler celebrates “drag” because it violates our traditional understanding of male/female. That is to say, the body, for social constructivists, is a cultural text or cultural sign; stylization of body is an encoding and decoding signifying process that yields one’s subversive meaning.

But I do not think that the social constructivists’ meaning of body, which simply treats the body as “text,” can fully “liberate” the true meaning of the body or affirm the value of the body.³ As David McNally argues, the postmodern constructivists’ approach to body finally destroys the body:

“After all, talk of the body is everywhere in postmodernist discourse. We have desiring bodies, performative bodies, cyborg bodies. Yet, there is something curiously attenuated

³ One of the accurate critiques of the social constructivists’ approach to body and gender is from the feminist Toril Moi’s critique of Butler’s radical anti-essentialism. For Moi, Butler’s anti-essentialist approach, which denies the concrete, material, living and dying body, finally destroys all meaning of the body: “When Butler conceives of gender as a category that does not include the body, however, she loses touch with Beauvoir’s category of ‘lived experience.’ As a result, she is left with only one way of conceptualizing the body, namely as sex...In Butler’s picture of sex and gender, sex becomes the inaccessible ground of gender, gender becomes completely disembodied, and the body itself is divorced from all meaning.” Toril Moi, What is a Woman? And Other Essays (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 74. While Moi believes that the body has its cultural and social dimensions, she does not think that the social constructivists should ignore the biological and physical dimensions of the body because of the fear of the biological determinism. Moi argues that, unless we accept the biological and physical dimensions of the body, we never realize how the biological factor is misused or abused in our gender formation.
about the postmodern body. It has been de-materialized, relieved of matter, biology, the
duff of organs, blood, nerves, and sinews... Sensible needs—for food, love, sex, and
shelter—are not countenanced in this discursive space. The postmodern body is thus
constituted by a radical disavowal of corporeal substance... Liberated from biology,
anatomy, physiology, social class, gender, and ethno-racial identity, the postmodern body
is free to invent itself. A plaything of the imagination, it can assume any shape and size,
any age or location, any identity its creator chooses; it is as one feminist critic puts it, 'no
body at all.'”

In addition to negating the multidimensionality of the body or the substance of the body,
the social constructivists fail to liberate and identify a subversive but ethical bodily power,
which rests on the natural body per se. In Levinas' ethics of the body, the natural body per
se has an ethical meaning when one exposes one's life towards the other, or vice versa.
Such a bodily exposure, which includes one's fragile face, physical pain, bodily suffering
or lack, does not need the aid of the external linguistic system to signify. Rather, the
sensual body or bodily exposure can generate an ethical meaning. That is to say, one's

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5 Alphonso Lingis has an excellent phenomenological description on how one's bodily emotion can
communicate one's interior life. See Alphonso Lingis, *The First Person Singular* (Evanston, Illinois,
tear and fear make us transparent to one another. For Levinas, such a bodily exposure, an overwhelming "sensational attack," can express the other's fragility and suffering. It is a subversive force that not only subverts the subject's egoism but also transgresses all repressive boundaries. But it is also an "ethical command" that commands the subject to leave his or her "comfort zone" and give his or her life for the other's suffering. Thus Levinas' natural bodily meaning is more radical than the social constructivists' textual bodily meaning because the former can show us the true subversive force of the body: it not only subverts all conceptual boundaries, but also makes the subject ethical.

Of course, it is not fair to say that all social constructivists completely ignore the natural meaning of the body. In fact, some social constructivists do recognize the power of the physical body. More specifically, some of them recognize that one's bodily pleasure is a powerful force that can subvert all repressive boundaries. In particular, inspired by Foucault's understanding of the subversive nature of pleasure, most social constructivists view bodily pleasure as an important "subversive force" to subvert all repressive social norms. For Foucault, pleasure is a "force" to resist sexual normalization and to create a new possibility of life. As McWhorter rightly says: "Pleasure figures prominently, then, in Foucault's understanding of power as normalization, but it also figures prominently in his excursions into discourses and practices having to do with
shaping an ethos, with leading a good or beautiful life. Pleasure, on Foucault’s view, is not just a state of the body or mind that occurs following some particular accomplishment or stimulus. Pleasure is not just an outcome. Pleasure, like power, is creative.⁶ Similarly, Butler believes that one’s playful drag identity can generate a pleasure that subverts all repressive social norms,⁷ and Linda Singer suggests that empowering one’s capacity to recreate one’s sexual pleasure is an effective way to resist and undermine the debilitating effects of the hegemonic forms of dominance.⁸

As was mentioned before, Foucault does not affirm the subversive or creative nature of the pleasure unconditionally; rather he views the use of pleasure from an ethical perspective. Foucault not only recognizes the subversive nature of the pleasure, but also recognizes the ethical nature of the pleasure. Unfortunately, most social constructivists fail to recognize Foucault’s ethical interpretation of the use of pleasure. Thus, while some

⁶ Ladelle McWhorter, Bodies and Pleasures, p. 177.
⁷ Admittedly, in recent years Judith Butler has been more concerned with the ethical ground of body politics and the ethical dimension of one’s sensation. This marks an ethical turn in her thought. In Precarious Life and Giving an Account of Oneself, Butler starts to explore the meaning of a livable life, especially the relation between normative violence and livability. In Precarious Life, a book written after September 11, 2001 (“9/11”), Butler further takes into account the meaning of grief and mourning so as to explore how one senses the other’s suffering in inter-corporeal relationships. See Judith Butler, Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence (London: Routledge, 2004). But Moya Lloyd argues that the idea of an ethically inflected politics is still a largely embryonic one in Butler’s work and, as such, it is difficult to assess its impact: “What it is possible to say, however, is that Butler’s ethical ‘turn’, if this is indeed what it is, raises a number of questions that have not yet been answered in full: whether the idea of an ethical impulse, as Butler deploys it, is like her account of the desire for existence, pre-discursive or not; whether there has been a shift from criticizing political ontologies to positing an ontology, an ontology of bodily vulnerability...” See Moya Lloyd, Judith Butler: From Norms to Politics (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 155.
social constructivists can recognize the creative or subversive power of one's natural
pleasure, they fail to recognize the ethical and unethical consequence of the use of
pleasure that Foucault emphasizes.

Yet, as this thesis shows, Foucault's regulative strategy of dealing with the excess
use of pleasure (care of self) cannot overcome one's egoism, since it fails to leave "room"
for the intervention of the other that can motivate the subject to take responsibility for the
other. Since care of the other, for Foucault, does not demand the subject to risk his or her
life for the other, Foucault's subject, who cannot mourn and weep, never acts ethically
and emphatically towards the other. Thus, while Foucault shows us a way of overcoming
one's egoism through regulating one's pleasure, this does not warrant that such a
pleasure-driven subject can become a truly responsible agent, who can fight against
social injustice and take care of those who suffer.

Therefore, while some social constructivists, inspired by Foucault, can affirm the
subversive or creative power of one's natural body, this does not mean that they can truly
recognize the comprehensive meaning of the natural body, especially its ethical meaning.
First, most social constructivists cannot do justice to Foucault's body theory: they only
recognize its affirmation of the subversive nature of the pleasure, but fail to appreciate its
ethical diagnosis of the use of pleasure. Second, even though some social constructivists
can recognize the ethical diagnosis of the use of pleasure from Foucault’s ethics, they still
cannot obtain a “right strategy” to overcome one’s egoism from Foucault’s failing
regulative strategy.

By contrast, and with the aid of phenomenology, Levinas shows us how concrete
bodily suffering can generate a subversive but ethical meaning. According to Levinas,
only sensing the other’s suffering can trigger one’s responsibility towards the other. In
contrast, pleasure-seeking only cultivates a self-centered subject. Thus, if we fail to give
priority to the experience of suffering, we can never cultivate a truly critical and
responsible subject. If we cannot feel pain and suffering through our body, we cannot
even communicate with other people the dreadful nature of violence. Sensing the other’s
suffering is a condition for us to be aware of the violent nature of social injustice. For
instance, most of us still have a strong impression towards a picture taken in the Vietnam
War, in which a naked young Vietnamese girl cried and ran with a burnt body. This
picture is powerful because we all “know” how pain feels and how “bad” it is when our
body is burnt.

For Levinas, ethical life is not driven by reasoning or deliberation, but by the voice
of the suffering other that urges the subject to participate in the long revolution against
social injustice. Unless we are exposed to the suffering of the other with our fragile
bodies, we will never want to take a risk-taking journey to stand by those who suffer. In other words, one’s sense of responsibility towards the other can only be aroused and maintained through one’s empathetic bodily relationship with the other’s suffering body. And one’s pleasure-seeking egoist mentality can only be “shaken” by one’s bodily exposure towards the other’s pain. Thus, the exposure of the subject’s fragile body towards the other turns Levinas’ subject into a mourning subject, not a pleasure-seeking subject.

Thus, social constructivists and Foucault, who simply treasure the mode of pleasure, not the mode of suffering, might fail to cultivate a responsible subject who takes the other’s suffering seriously. Their subversive subject easily becomes an egoist subject because such a pleasure-driven subject need not give up his or her physical body for the other. In particular, some social constructivists treat the body as a “political medium” that subverts the repressive social norms, rather than an “ethical medium” that relates the subject to the other’s fragile and suffering body. Unlike Levinas, Foucault and the social constructivists ignore the mode of suffering or pain and consequently fail to recognize and liberate the ethical potentiality of the body.

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9 Of course, Butler is an exception. In recent writings she agrees that a mourning and vulnerable subject, who can sense the suffering of the other, is important for contemporary politics: “To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself.” See Judith Butler, Precarious Life, p. 30.
Of course, I do not deny the importance of pleasure, especially its creative, subversive and life-flourishing nature, in one’s bodily life. And I endorse Ricoeur’s criticism that Levinas’ ethical subject, who is driven by the debt of other, can easily become a self-hating, not self-respecting subject. Yet if contemporary body politics is solely led by a pleasure-driven subject who cannot mourn for the other’s suffering, this might turn body politics into a pleasure-fulfilling egoist politics, not a politics of solidarity that fights against today’s societal destruction of human bodies. Moreover, I also believe that body politics is not only a politics of subversion that subverts the repressive social norms, but also a politics of compassion that can challenge our indifference towards those who suffer. Introducing Levinas’ notion of an empathetic subject into contemporary body politics is not to deny the value of pleasure, but to retrieve the significance of suffering neglected by most social constructivists today. Levinas’ ethical embodied subject offers us a more comprehensive way to re-examine the praxis of contemporary body and sexual politics.

In sum, while this chapter shows that both Foucault and Levinas can modify the social constructivists’ problematic approach to the body, I argue that it is Levinas’ ethics of the body, not Foucault’s ethics of body, that can offer contemporary body politics a more solid ethical ground, especially for an ethical formation of the subversive subject.
This does not mean that Foucault makes no contribution for contemporary body politics. His genealogical critique of various kinds of the bodily repression can supplement Levinas’ phenomenological approach, which lacks a concrete historical analysis of the formation of the body. Moreover, Foucault, as an anti-essentialist and constructivist, does not give up thinking through the ethical condition of being ethical after the critique of modernity and rationalism. In particular, he shows us the value of the care of self in one’s ethical life. We can connect this with Levinas’ care of other in offering us a comprehensive understanding of one’s ethical formation after a postmodern critique of Cartesian dualism.
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