

The debate about freedom in the works of Foucault

A critique of the three dominant approaches to the problem of freedom and a new approach: Subjectification through institutions

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A debate about freedom in Foucault's works was kicked off when political philosophers such as Habermas, Fraser and Taylor treated Foucault as one of them, as a political theorist, and criticized him for having an implausible account of freedom due to his Nietzschean concept of power. Other interpreters, who are both interested in political theory and sympathetic to Foucault, defended Foucault and came up with interpretations of his works which are aimed at constructing a coherent theory of freedom in the Foucaultian framework of subjectification and power. In this paper, I reconstruct the best versions of the three main types of approaches to make Foucault into a coherent political theorist, and criticize them for failing to solve the problem of freedom they aimed to solve, in order to propose a new approach. The three approaches are:

1. "Foucault corrects himself" (Thomas Lemke). Foucault had a deficient concept of freedom in his genealogical works, but he corrects his mistakes and develops a coherent concept in his late works, especially volumes 2 and 3 of the *History of Sexuality*, the important article *Subject and Power*, and some interviews. I criticize that this interpretation conflates two concepts of freedom which can be found in Foucault: freedom as the capability to act differently in a given situation (about which Foucault talks prominently in *Subject and Power*) and the more demanding notion of freedom as critique.

2. "Foucault criticizes coherently" (Martin Saar). Foucault's method of genealogical critique works with rhetorical dramatizations and his statements about how power determines subjects are such dramatizations and not social theory, and therefore not a social theoretical problem. I criticize that this doesn't solve the problem that the theoretical insight about being constituted (not determined) by power destabilizes our notion of freedom. I develop the thesis that because genealogy is aimed to destabilize our common concepts, it is in a tension with the very aim of political philosophy's struggle to develop better concepts and therefore cannot solve the problem of freedom alone standing.

3. "Foucault is not enough" (Amy Allen). In order to understand freedom in a framework of subjectification, we have to regain the ability to differentiate between repressive and emancipating subjectification by combining Foucault's account of power with Habermas' account of autonomy. I criticize that by only talking about social protest as a means of freedom and not its institutionalization, also such an approach of recombination cannot differentiate between power and freedom.

Through the internal critique of these interpretations, I develop a new approach to the problem of freedom: Freedom as the capacity to critically reflect one's own subjectification is dependent on regimes of subjectification, which instantiate this capacity and which are partly dependent on political institutions.