THE CONDITIONS OF OUR FREEDOM: FOUCAULT, ORGANIZATION, AND ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the contribution of the French philosopher Michel Foucault to the subject of ethics in organizations. The paper combines an analysis of Foucault's work on discipline and control, with an examination of his later work on the ethical subject and technologies of the self. Our paper argues that the work of the later Foucault provides an important contribution to business ethics theory, practice and pedagogy. We discuss how it offers an alternative avenue to traditional normative ethical theory that both converges and diverges with other extant alternatives. By situating ethics as practices of the self, and by demonstrating the conditions under which freedom in organizations can be exercised, Foucault's ethics attempt to connect an understanding and critique of power with a personal project of self. He therefore provides a theory of subjectivity that potentially informs a reshaping of contemporary virtue ethics theory, value-based management, and business ethics teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

The work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, has attracted increasing attention in the social sciences. Indeed, in Posner's study of public intellectuals (Posner, 2001: 197), Foucault emerges as by far the most cited in scholarly publications. In management and organization theory too, Foucault's work has been increasingly recognized as offering important and innovative avenues for theoretical development (Burrell, 1988; Knights and Collinson, 1987; Knights, 1992; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Townley, 1993). Advocates of Foucault suggest that he is 'one of the major modern ethical thinkers of modernity' (Rabinow, 1997: xxvi).

To date, though, Foucault's work has had relatively little impact on the business ethics literature, with critics arguing that he offers little more than an 'abstract polemic' of 'endless criticism' (Feldman, 2002). Are business ethics scholars right to dismiss, or at best to ignore, the work of Foucault? Or does he have something of substance to offer the field? In this paper, we seek to address this question by examining, in particular, the nature of Foucault's later writings, his 'ethical period' (Styhre, 2001), where his preoccupation was the ethical subject and technologies of the self, rather than the technologies of discipline and control that characterized his earlier periods (Paras, 2006). This later period has spawned a range of analyses of ethics in relation to social practices including eating (Probyn, 1999), nursing (Peter, Lunardi, & Macfarlane, 2004), drug taking (Sybylla, 2001), sport (Markula, 2003), education (Infinito, 2003) and politics (Flyvberg,

1998), yet management researchers, and business ethics scholars in particular, have largely neglected Foucault's ethics.

In our view, Foucault's ethics offer some important, though necessarily limited, contributions to the business ethics literature, which deserve our attention. First, he offers some alternative ways of thinking about freedom as a concept relevant to business ethics. Rather than seeing freedom as an entitlement to be acknowledged by managers, he posits freedom as a condition of being human that can never be absolute but can only ever be exercised within a field of discipline and control. As such, we can discern a little more clearly some of the *conditions* of our freedom in organizations.

Foucault's ethics also offer a new alternative to rule-based business ethics. This alternative, which is primarily centered on the idea of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988a), provides some interesting convergences and divergences with extant alternatives to rule-based approaches. Foucault's ethics' main contribution to these alternatives is a richer understanding of how we participate in the formation of our own subjectivity. He offers a way to connect an understanding and critique of power with a personal project of self. By outlining the linkages here with theories of moral imagination, virtue ethics, values-based management, and business ethics pedagogy, we seek to demonstrate how this approach could advance our existing knowledge in novel ways, whilst also making clear some of the challenges that it poses.

We begin then by putting Foucault's later work in the context of his overall contribution to management theory and business ethics. This is to demonstrate the importance of Foucault's conception of discipline, domination, and power/knowledge¹ as a bedrock for understanding his perspective on the ethical subject, whilst also showing how

such concerns may have obscured for some his subsequent attention to ethics. Our concern is to question the emphasis upon Foucault's view of discipline and control that characterizes most organization studies research that engages with his work. This emphasis is understandable since this is an issue that Foucault himself struggled to move beyond, although only in a limited way, until his later work. We are striving here to create a reconstructive reading of Foucault that does justice to the complexity of the different issues – most notably the possibility of transcending external control – that he was wrestling with in this later work, and to use this to map out new theoretical ground in business ethics.

To reconstruct Foucault for business ethics in this way, we argue that we need to focus upon more than the disciplinary concerns of his earlier work. It is in the later work and, in particular, in the concept of technologies of the self, that we find the most developed of Foucault's contributions to ethics. Here his major concern is how 'individuals create their own identities through ethics and forms of self-constitution' (Best & Kellner, 1991: 61). In this paper, we discuss this later work and examine in some detail its implications and limitations for current debates about business ethics theory, practice and pedagogy.

FOUCAULT, MANAGEMENT THEORY, AND ETHICS: DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES AND DOCILE BODIES

Michel Foucault's work has been studied, interpreted, and utilized across the social sciences and humanities. His contribution to organizational analysis has been growing in importance, particularly in the areas of 'critical' management theory (e.g.

Burrell, 1988; Chan & Garrick, 2002; Deetz, 1992; Jermier et al., 1994; Knights and Willmott, 1989; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Sewell, 1998), empirical organization research (Knights and McCabe, 2003; Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992) and human resource management (Styhre, 2001; Townley, 1993). In the main, his work has been interpreted in a particular way to support a critical perspective on management and organization as instruments of domination and exploitation (Townley, 1993). This reading of Foucault emphasizes management as the exercise of power/knowledge and organization as being fundamentally about discipline and control (see for example Burrell, 1988; Townley, 1993; Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000). Organizations have been conceptualized as ‘carceral’ institutions that delimit personal freedom: ‘prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons’ (Foucault, 1979a: 228).

The currently dominant reading of Foucault in management research therefore focuses upon the negatives of disciplinary practice (McKinlay & Starkey, 1998)². For example, Townley (1993) examines HRM practices as ‘mechanisms of registration, assessment and classification’ and argues that they constitute ‘a body of knowledge [which] operates to objectify those on whom it is applied ... Classification schemes, offered as techniques of simplification and clarification for the analysis of labor, both as effort and object, become inextricably tied to its disciplinary operation. ... HRM employs disciplinary practices to create knowledge and power. These practices fix individuals in conceptual and geographical space, and they order or articulate the labor process. Processes of individualization and individuation create an industrial subject who is analyzable and describable’ (Townley, 1993: 541). Similarly Barker (1993) situates Foucault in the line of organization theory that is concerned with control as a central

issue, coupling him with Weber in the assumption that organizational life is increasingly rationalized, controlled, and controlling.

Such accounts focus upon the work of Foucault that has become most influential in the Anglo-Saxon literature, namely his book *Discipline and Punish*. Here, the emphasis is upon the creation of ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault, 1979a), individuals constrained against their will by discipline embodied in technologies of domination (Foucault, 1988a: 19). It is not, then, implausible to read Foucault's conception of subjectivity ‘as a product of controlling and dominating social bonds... of the person as simply responding to disciplinary power’ (Ezzy, 1997: 428). In the light of this reading, the main contribution to date of Foucauldian analysis to our understanding of ethics in organizations has been the critical reading of the disciplinary basis of organizational life and the concomitant subjugation of morality to power (Chikudate, 2002; Feldman, 2002: 133-153; Hiley, 1987; Vandekerckhove & Commers, 2003). According to this view, morality is embedded in the ‘rules of right’ (Vandekerckhove & Commers, 2003: 46) and ‘hidden norms of appropriate conduct’ (Kelemen & Peltonen, 2001: 154) that are produced by, and constitutive of, the relations of power. The disciplinary power of the ordering, categorization and ritualization of daily activities – the regime of truth – rewards conformity and penalizes resistance in order to impose and enforce norms of behavior (Chikudate, 2002). What is ‘right’ in such contexts is what is ‘normal.’

To the extent that it is possible to elucidate a purpose or project for business ethics in this pessimistic view of organizational life, the main injunction that can be drawn from Foucault’s emphasis on disciplinary power is the necessity of problematizing norms and revealing the structures and forces that oppress and make docile the individual subject.

Whilst such activities are undoubtedly important, there are, as Feldman (2002: 145-6) argues, dangers here of engaging in an ‘abstract polemic against the oppression of modern organizations’ and ‘an ethic of endless criticism’. As Calàs and Smircich (1999: 649) ask (rhetorically) in relation to Foucault and his contemporaries’ work: ‘how can we reconstruct or get anything positive from this?’

BEYOND DISCIPLINARY POWER AND RULES OF RIGHT: THE CONDITIONS OF FREEDOM

To some extent, the identification of Foucault’s work as a resource primarily for a critique of power relations in business ethics is legitimate in that it shows how the exercise of power can so constitute subjects as to deny them any possibility of behaving ethically³. However, there are two reasons why this does not tell us the whole story. First, this reading of Foucault excludes his own concerns, even when writing about discipline and domination, to demonstrate the intimate interrelationship between power and freedom. Attributing passivity to subjects is not consistent with Foucault’s relational concept of power. For Foucault (1982), freedom is an underlying condition of power since, in its absence, power relationships could only be sustained through domination. His discussion of docile subjects was partly a concern to draw attention to the abandonment of their own freedom; he encouraged them to refuse to be what they had become through the effects of power (Foucault, 1982). For even in *Discipline and Punish*, which has been the bible for both critics (Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995, Sosteric, 1996) and supporters (Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992; Sewell, 1998) alike in attributing to Foucault a view of subjectivity as

determined by power, he argues:

Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions.....power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure on them, **just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them** (Foucault, 1979a: 26-27, emphasis added).

Second, it is clearly evident in Foucault's later work – the 'ethical period' (Styhre, 2001) – that his emphasis changed, and that he more fully developed a concept of individual ethics that transcended critique (Paras, 2006). As Best & Kellner (1991) contend, there are both continuities and significant discontinuities between Foucault's previous work with that of his later ethical period. His goal became 'to show people that they are much freer than they feel' (Foucault, 1988b: 10). In the later work, discipline is construed in a different way than previously. It is no longer exclusively or even mainly conceived of as something that is done *to* people by others. It becomes inextricably linked with the nature of desire and desire finds expression through forms of (self-) discipline, freely embraced, embedded in concepts of ethics and of community. Foucault himself saw this later work as a shift in emphasis. 'Perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988b: 19).

This concern with the possibilities of, as well as the limits to, freedom informs much of Foucault's (1979b; 1985a; 1988c) last period of writing, beginning with the transitional work, the first volume of *History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, and continuing through to his last two

books (volumes II and III), and associated writings and lectures⁴. This latter agenda is concerned with uncovering not only what Foucault views as the terms of our imprisonment but also ‘the conditions of our freedom’ (Dumas, 1996: 78) and its creative use in the self-formation of subjects resistant to being subjugated by power (Foucault, 1988a). The notion of freedom therefore provides a fundamental basis for Foucauldian ethics (Sybylla, 2001), freedom to resist and struggle in order to minimize domination. ‘Freedom,’ he contends, ‘is the ontological condition of ethics’ (Foucault, 1997: 284).

Of course, freedom is a necessary condition for many ethical theories, including contractarian ethics, justice, and rights-based or entitlement theories. Foucault’s conception of personal freedom, however, is never an absolute state, or an end point in a liberation struggle, but rather a defining characteristic of what it is to be human. Therefore, he sets out to articulate a set of practices that enable us to reflexively construct ourselves whilst enmeshed in the fields of power relations (Rajchman, 1991).

For Foucault, then, ethics is a practical concept, ‘used to denote the possibilities of individual agency.... rather than following a religiously-based norm, or acting in accordance with some Kantian transcendental imperative’ (Styhre, 2001: 799). Ethics concerns not so much moral norms, as it does free choice (Best & Kellner, 1991). Given his emphasis on disciplinary forces and structures, though, Foucault’s belief is that freedom is necessarily limited and can never be absolute, thus ‘a society without restrictions is inconceivable’ (Foucault, 1997: 148). As Sybylla (2001) emphasizes, Foucault’s definition of freedom is therefore crucially different from that of liberal individualism⁵ – where it has often been defined in an atomistic way as an absence of constraints on the individual (Berlin, 1966) – and he goes to considerable lengths ‘to define what freedom can mean in a

world that is patently created through and within interdependent relationships and in subjects who can never be conceived as atomized' (2001: 74). According to Foucault, freedom comes from the ability to participate actively and purposefully in power relations, not from escaping them:

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behavior of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication [as suggested by Habermas], but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination (Foucault, 1994: 18).

What this means is that, despite the disciplinary forces of modern societies, docility is not inevitable; domination is not unavoidable. In this view, ethical behavior involves contesting the tendency to pursue power for its own sake, and thereby minimizing domination in our relations. Foucault's concern is to examine how we can constitute ourselves as active moral agents within such fields of disciplinary practices. Foucault's situating of freedom within disciplinary regimes suggests one way, at least, in which we might consider the types of limits imposed on business ethics (Jones, 2003) as well as the opportunities for agency within the constraints of bureaucratic organization. We will return to this in more detail below in our discussion of the implications of Foucault's ethics for business ethics. However, before we do so, it is necessary to provide a more detailed analysis of what Foucault's perspective implies in terms of acting ethically in organizations. To do this, we explore his ideas of ethics as practice and examine his notion of 'technologies of the self'.

FOUCAULT'S ETHICS OF PRACTICE AND TECHNOLOGIES OF THE SELF

Throughout his work, Foucault exhibits a profound concern with ethics and morality, but it is only in his later work that he fully addresses the question of what it means to act ethically as an individual. Here, he advises us to create a critical ontology of our selves, which should be conceived not as a theory, doctrine or an accumulating permanent body of knowledge, but as *ethical practices*. Such practices are essentially an analysis of how we create our selves, involving both a critique of what we are, and at the same time an 'historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them' (Foucault, 1997: 319). Attention to the self therefore raises issues about our capacity to form ourselves in an image we desire, the factors limiting this capacity, and our willingness to do this. In the later work, it is the will of subjects to participate in their own subjectivization that becomes as important to Foucault as the external power and constraints that also constitute their subjectivity.

Foucault defines ethical behavior as the outcome of:

[A] process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself ... A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject (Foucault, 1985a: 28).

Therefore, in the trajectory of Foucault's work, a concern with the 'history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self' replaces the concern with 'a history

of systems of morality based, hypothetically, on interdictions' (Foucault, 1985a: 13). Nonetheless, in contrast to his earlier work, the later Foucault is not entirely antagonistic to Kantian imperatives and rationality, not least in Kant's belief in the duty of the individual to exercise self-control – both for self-improvement but for the betterment of society (Foucault, 1985a; Best & Kellner, 1991; Danaher et al., 2000). However, the emphasis on the possibilities of individual agency and free choice certainly opens up some different avenues for thinking about ethical behavior compared with the traditional path of deontology. These are encapsulated most succinctly in Foucault's (1985a; 1988a) notion of 'technologies of the self'.

Foucault defines technologies of the self as 'those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being' (Foucault, 1985a: 10-11). Foucault's examination of the formation of the subject took him to extensive studies of ancient Greece and Rome where an ethic was developing which was very explicitly oriented to the care of oneself, toward definite objectives such as retiring into oneself, reaching oneself, living with oneself, being sufficient to oneself, profiting by and enjoying oneself (Foucault, 1988c). In ancient communities, these practices of self-discipline included abstinences, memorizations, examinations of conscience, meditations, silence, and listening to others. Thus, through forms of self-definition and self-constraint, people train themselves to become ethical persons. From this view flowed the idea that the self is not given to us, but that 'we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (Rabinow, 1984: 351).

Foucault's ethics therefore promote a strategy of reflexivity through which we can potentially transform ourselves. It is essentially a non-humanist project because Foucault

rejects the idea of an authentic, absolute self but rather champions an ‘ethics of creativity’ as opposed to an ‘ethics of authenticity’ (Owen, 1994: 201-2). The ethical task is to challenge oneself as one is, or finds oneself, and to ‘take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration ... Thus modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being’; it compels him to face the task of producing himself’ (Rabinow, 1984: 41-2). As such, technologies of the self do not have a desired end state, but are an ongoing set of reflexive practices that work and rework the self in relation to disciplinary power. Developing technologies of the self therefore involves developing oneself into someone who is more aware of the possible effects of disciplinary procedures and, therefore, better able to resist them (Ransom, 1997: 139). In the later work, one of Foucault’s concerns in focusing upon Greek and Roman morality was to compare Christian sexual morality, which he thought obsessed with regulation through coercion and compulsion, with the emphasis in the earlier ethics with self-awareness, self-management and self-mastery (Elliott, 2001: 89-90).

Foucault provides a highly illuminating account of how the ancient Greeks and Romans cared for and constituted themselves in terms of their diet and health, sexuality and vitality, abstinences and self-constraints, as well as their general critical attitude towards the self that anticipates its continuous improvement. However, it is difficult to see how this account can be related directly to business ethics in contemporary organizations. In the following section, we therefore seek to draw out some of the key implications of Foucault’s ethics for contemporary business ethics theory, practice and pedagogy, whilst also considering their necessary limits.

A FOUCAULDIAN BUSINESS ETHICS?

Foucault's major potential contribution is his insistence that we intervene positively in the self-formation process of developing our subjectivity rather than being docile in the face of power. Foucault's ethics and technologies of the self therefore offer a perspective on morality that represents a departure from much mainstream thinking in business ethics, but also draws from and contributes to a number of existing currents in the discipline. In this section, we will sketch out some of the ways in which Foucault's approach offers a contribution to business ethics theory by elucidating on the grounding of ethics in practices of the self and on reconstituting the virtuous subject. We will then turn to the implications of this for management practice and the pedagogy of business ethics.

Grounding Ethics in Practices of Self Rather Than Rules

The identification of Foucault's ethics as practices of self-discipline and self-governance rather than moral rules and interdictions are part of a broader current in the business literature around alternatives to traditional normative ethical theory. This includes, for example, attention to pragmatism (Rorty, 2006; Rosenthal & Buchholz, 2000), Habermasian discourse ethics (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007), moral imagination (Werhane, 1998) and virtue ethics (Moore, 2002, 2005). Foucault shares with such alternatives an attempt to provide not universal rules or principles for ethical decision-making, but rather the development of different ways of thinking about what it means to act ethically. Thus, just as Rorty (2006: 371) posits that 'God has provided no algorithms

for resolving tough moral dilemmas, and neither have the great secular philosophers', Foucault also contends that, 'we should not waste our time searching in vain for universals. Where universals are said to exist, or where people tacitly assume they exist, universals must be questioned' (Flyvberg, 1998: 222). This is not to suggest that Foucault is a pragmatist, or even a postmodernist (he famously rejected all attempts to categorize his work) but simply to show how he shares a strand of thinking with other philosophers critical of rule-based systems of morality.

There are, of course, substantial difficulties here with Foucault's position in that whilst he ferociously rejects all attempts to provide universal moral rules and principles, he clearly stands for *something* – most notably a valuing of freedom, and an abhorrence of tyranny and domination. Such a stance has led many to question the consistency and coherence of Foucault's ethics, with Habermas (1987), for one, labeling him a 'cryptonormativist'. Does Foucault let moral principles in, as it were, through the back door? The answer to this is probably a qualified yes, in that Foucault does demonstrate some features of what Kolodny (1996) has called 'closet normativism'. But there are two important distinctions that need to be made here in order to see that Foucault's rejection of moral rules may still be logically sustainable. First, it can be argued that whilst Foucault clearly rejected normative theory, he did not necessarily reject the underlying essence of certain norms or values (Kolodny, 1996). One can value an idea of freedom, yet still encourage skepticism towards how 'freedom' has been institutionalized or normalized as a disciplinary practice. Second, it can be argued that there are certain forms of universality that may escape Foucault's critique – in particular a universality of how the self and/or others are (or *should be*) acknowledged as morally significant or equal (Cordner, 2004).

The rejection of normative rules of behavior does not have to coincide with a rejection of normative beliefs about what it is to be human.

So yes, the contention that Foucault's ethics are non-normative is difficult to sustain, even if we accept that they reject normative rules. However, it could still be countered that technologies of the self are rules of a sort. But this misses the point that Foucault does not seek to offer a recipe for how one can choose or create a mode of being, or a way of working on the self. He makes a case for why we should do it, but not of how, or even where it will take us. Of course, one of the main difficulties in applying Foucault's work to business ethics is exactly this sustained reluctance to offer any substantive normative prescriptions. However, Foucault's emphasis is more on educating individuals to understand how they have been constituted and disciplined as subjects, encouraging in them the possibilities of self-determination, and working towards creating a satisfying life that goes beyond docility and domination. By this, we mean beyond domination of the self by disciplinary forces, as well as beyond the domination of others by the self. As Sybylla (2001: 75) argues:

Rather, then, than telling us what we are, what we should be, or what we should do, Foucault acts ethically in taking the risk of giving us choice: once people have been given the vital knowledge of how forms of power have acted upon and constructed them, then they are 'left to make up their own minds, to choose, in the light of this, their own existence' (1988b: 50). This insistence upon giving the other free ethical choice is the closest Foucault ever comes to laying down a moral code.⁶

This freeing up of our ethical sensibilities has resonances with the idea of developing moral imagination (Werhane, 1998). Foucault can be seen to offer a route for the development of moral imagination beyond the everyday scripts or organizing frameworks through which we habitually encounter and respond to ethical problems, in

particular by articulating a methodology by which we can excavate the mental models that constrain us. Located in what Foucault termed ‘genealogy’, this approach is based on the idea that any given system of thought, any set of morals, is the result of contingent turns of history, and is not the outcome of an imposed rationality or grand scheme of progress⁷. For Foucault, the rules contained in business ethics textbooks, in corporate codes of conduct, or simply in ‘normal’ ways of doing business would be constitutive of a mode of domination and normalization, and so ethical behavior from his perspective would entail analyzing, critiquing and revealing the regimes of truth that legitimated such rules, and then going beyond criticism towards developing modes of thought and action that minimized domination by these regimes. On the one hand, this provides a specific way of engendering moral imagination insofar as it ‘helps us out of a particular framing box, leading us to refocus our attention, to criticize, revise, and reconstruct other operative mental models’ (Werhane & Gorman, 2005: 601). On the other hand, Foucault’s approach to moral imagination differs from that presented in the business ethics literature in that it orients much more towards an analysis of how we have participated in our own domination by following rule based models and he envisages an alternative moral project of subjective self-formation and creation.

Deviation from other alternatives to rule-based approaches is also evident. For example, Habermas (1994: 7) sees ethics primarily residing in ‘the institutionalization of ... procedures and conditions of communication’ in democratic decision-making processes. In a business context, this suggests attention to democratic control on the public use of corporate power (Scherer & Palazzo, 2007). For Foucault, though, it would be impossible to conceive of power being controlled by institutionalized procedures – because institutions

inescapably exert disciplinary forces that, in the absence of moral reflection and resistance, would dominate us. Similarly, in relation to pragmatism, a refusal to acknowledge the importance of power in enacting non rule-based systems of business ethics (e.g. Rosenthal & Buchholz, 2000) would be seen as incomplete and naive from the perspective of Foucault's ethics.

Thus, where Foucault most notably diverges from many of those who share his condemnation of rule-based morality is the attempt to connect an understanding and critique of power with a personal project of self⁸. According to this view, it is insufficient to focus on either institutions and procedures, or on individuals and their mental models. The contribution of Foucault's ethics lies in demonstrating how the self is both the target of power and also the condition for acting differently – a theory of ethics that is oriented to how the self is constrained and made free whilst enmeshed in disciplinary forces. Once it is recognized that we do not fully need to act in accordance with the demands of power but can produce ourselves in accordance with the image that we desire, Foucault believes that we will treat the self like we might a work of art. Ethical practice then becomes a project of and for the self.

Reconstituting the Virtuous Subject

The self, of course, is foregrounded in other approaches to business ethics, most notably virtue ethics. Therefore, the second main contribution that Foucault potentially makes to our understanding of ethics in organizations concerns his attention to the nature and formation of the virtuous subject.

Although in his writings there is little explicit acknowledgement of a link to virtue

ethics, there are clear parallels between Foucault's ethics and virtue ethics. In going back to pre-modern times, to the civilisations of Ancient Greece and Rome, to unearth and examine examples of ethics based on free choice and self-discipline, Foucault draws on both Socrates and Aristotle.

From Socrates, he takes the championing of *parrhésia*, literally 'saying everything' particularly confronting those in power with difficult truths. This form of truth-telling is pursued as a way of caring both for self and for fellow citizens, as Socrates did, 'attending to his fellow citizens like a father or an older brother in order to show them that what is important is not money or reputation but the care of themselves ... not a concern for the world but for wisdom, truth, and for their own soul. ... Foucault defines such care as the use of one's reasoning in order to find out who one is and how one can be best' (Nehamas, 1998: 165-6 - translation of Foucault lecture at the Collège de France, 15 February 1984). Care of the self and care of and for the other are two sides of the same coin. Foucault insists upon Socrates' role as a public one, in the service of his city: 'In urging you to care for yourselves, I am being useful to the whole city. And if I try to protect my life, it is precisely in the city's interest that I am doing it; it is in the city's interest to protect true discourse, the courageous truth-telling which urges the citizens to care for themselves' (cited in Nehamas, 1998: 168).

From Aristotle, Foucault takes up the idea that ethics is less about the morality of actions than it is the moral character of agents. According to Aristotle, the virtuous person feels an inner moral obligation to live the good life, and seek excellence for its own sake rather than for personal material and symbolic gain. Thus, virtuous persons are heroic in promoting community values and solidarity not simply in order to gain the

approval of others but for purposes of sustaining excellent social practices. These themes are strongly echoed in Foucault's ethics, as they are in other modern accounts of virtue ethics.

Alasdair MacIntyre, for example, is another modern philosopher, who, like Foucault, has drawn heavily on Aristotle's virtue ethics as a challenge to prevailing commitments to the Enlightenment and Kantian ethics. MacIntyre is a sceptic regarding deontological conceptions of ethics defined as rational action based on duty or rules, or utilitarian ethics that are concerned with the greatest happiness for the largest number of people. MacIntyre (1984: 114) argues that 'there can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Instead, like Foucault, he follows Nietzsche in criticising Enlightenment reason and morality on the basis that it was little more than a disguise or mask for the expression or assertions of subjective will – the will-to-power. For Nietzsche (1975), such reason was a 'recipe to counter [human] passions' (101); rules or imperatives (categorical or otherwise) are no substitute for morality in that an un-reflexive compliance to rules simply removes the moral choice or dilemma (Derrida, 1992) and de-sensitizes us to any sense of moral judgment. Indeed, it could be argued that ethics are displaced when bureaucratized through a system of rules. Like Foucault, then, MacIntyre is concerned not with the rules that we ought to obey but with what kind of a person each of us should become, and how we should live our lives – an inescapably practical question, yet one that is marginal to Enlightenment morality (MacIntyre, 1984: 118).

Departing a little from Aristotle, both MacIntyre and Foucault avoid drawing up a list of character traits, and instead focus on other orientations towards the virtuous

subject. But here they seem to diverge, and ultimately MacIntyre and Foucault make uneasy bedfellows. Whilst MacIntyre focuses on how a virtuous character entails a capacity for judgment and practical wisdom within a community of practice, Foucault addresses the practices that enable the self to be worked on and continuously reconstituted. The former locates ethical practices and rationality in tradition (Kuna, 2005) whilst the latter locates them in the ongoing creation of the self. Although Foucault explores ancient civilisations to identify technologies of the self, he does not seek to promote these as models for the present. The traditions of the past are less relevant in terms of their specific content than they are to show that the modern subject has not always been so. Ancient practices are thus not imitable but do speak to our situation by suggesting that there are other ways of relating to our selves and others (Paras, 2006: 131). So, in their rejection of rules and attention to personal character, Foucault and MacIntyre both prompt a reinvigoration of virtue ethics, but ultimately they take it in different directions.

For MacIntyre, ethics is not just choosing what to do as individuals, but also and more importantly discovering who we are in relation to others – in short, our membership of organizations, communities and societies. Ethics can only serve as a guide on how to behave in particular localised contexts (MacIntyre, 1984: 119). Although there is not necessarily an incompatibility between Foucault's continual working on the self in pursuit of an ethical life and responsibility to the community and society, his analysis is probably at its weakest in making explicit how this connection might work. For example, as he suggested in an interview only months before his death, relationships with others could be implied from his approach to freedom and ethics, but this remained undeveloped

in his work:

The care of the self ... implies complex relationships with others insofar as this ethos of freedom is also a way of caring for others.... Ethos also implies a relationship with others, insofar as the care of the self enables one to occupy his rightful position in the city, the community, or interpersonal relationships, whether as a magistrate or a friend.... Thus, the problem of relationships with others is present throughout the development of the care for the self. (Foucault, 1997: 287)

One can thus draw on MacIntyre's development of Aristotelian ethics to temper Foucault's tendency at times to accommodate a Nietzschean will-to-power. It is arguable whether this tendency would have been overcome as he sought to develop a more fully realized account of interrelationships between free subjects, but in MacIntyre we can find a far more robust account of how virtuous subjects may be accommodated into community relations .

Conversely, Foucault's approach potentially contributes to contemporary accounts of virtue ethics a more lucid and compelling account of how the process of virtuous character formation – the very act of exploring one's agency – might constitute an ethical practice, albeit in a slightly different way than 'practice' is understood by MacIntyre (see for example Moore, 2002). He also points to some of the dangers in relying on tradition for developing ethics and rationality, and the necessity of calling into question the disciplinary power of traditions.

From Conformity to Enabling Self-Governance in Managing Business Ethics

As we have shown, whilst Foucault provides a substantial account of why we should develop an ethics of the self, he is necessarily reluctant to elaborate on how this might be effected in practice. To do so, of course, would lead to the kind of normalizing

moral rules that he challenges. As such, the management of business ethics is a difficult idea to reconcile with Foucault's ethics since his focus is on self-governance rather than the management of others. His approach does offer some illumination though to current debates about the management of ethics in organizations, not least in the analysis of the role of codes of conduct and values-based approaches to management.

Foucault's ethics provide a contribution to the extant 'critical' literature on codes of conduct, where some authors have argued that they can be questionable control mechanisms (Cassell, Johnson, & Smith, 1997; Stansbury & Barry, 2007), or even that they 'constitute an unconscionable regression' (Schwartz, 2000: 173) towards management control. Such accounts identify the limitations of codes that stifle the moral agency of individuals whilst seeking to engender enhanced standards of employee ethics (MacLagan, 2007). In this sense, codes raise the 'specter of indoctrination' whereby the moral autonomy of the individual is infringed by a 'closure of interpretation and criticism' (Stansbury & Barry, 2007: 248-9), and individual competence is atrophied by the referral of ethical decision making to legal and compliance experts (Stansbury & Barry, 2007: 253-4). Foucault's ethics help us to advance this debate by suggesting that codes do not simply stifle moral agency in themselves, but are part of a more deep-rooted process of subjectivization – i.e. codes of conduct are simply one of the more obvious manifestations of the ways in which the ethical subject is acted upon by power or disciplinary practices.

Foucault, then, makes possible a form of ethical behaviour towards codes – this would entail analysing, critiquing and revealing the regimes of truth that are constituted by codes, and developing modes of thought and action that minimise domination by them. This does not mean that we should believe that all codes are pointless, unnecessary or

dangerous, but that attention should focus on reducing their potential to render us docile, and maximizing their potential for us to realize our moral agency and imagination. As discussed earlier, Foucault would not suggest that it is possible to be free of the disciplinary forces of codes, but that to act ethically, one has to look to how one can constitute oneself as an active moral agent in the face of them.

This type of approach clearly poses a challenge to a compliance-based orientation to the management of business ethics, but it also does not align easily with its primary alternative - namely, a values or integrity-based orientation (see Paine, 1994; Treviño et al., 1999; Weaver & Treviño, 1999). Values based approaches define organizational values and encourage employee commitment to certain ethical aspirations (Paine, 1994). They are seen as enabling frameworks for employees that are built upon consensus and counseling rather than obligation and enforcement (Weaver & Treviño, 1999). Again though, Foucauldian ethics would suggest that we should look critically at such efforts to normalize what 'we' stand for, and would prompt managers to eschew efforts at cultural integration around shared organizational values: 'The problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a 'we' in order to assert the principles one recognises and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a 'we' possible by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me the 'we' must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result – and the necessarily temporary result – of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it' (Rabinow, 1984: 385). This suggests that whilst values-based programs may well be more effective than compliance programs alone, and indeed may well be viewed more positively by employees (Treviño et al. 1999; Weaver & Treviño, 1999; Stansbury &

Barry, 2007), they still have considerable potential to act against the formation of active self-governing moral subjects. Values-based approaches do not eschew control as a mechanism for ethics management, but rather shift the form of control from coercion (in compliance based approaches) to enablement (Stansbury & Barry, 2007).

If we follow this path, we do not need to dispense with values/integrity approaches entirely, however. Some values-based approaches emphasise the importance of value differentiation and the role of autonomy and dissent in order to promote moral imagination and learning (e.g. Sinclair, 1994; Starkey, 1998). Others emphasize the importance of eschewing a ‘cult-like’ organizational culture by being open to regular criticism from employees and the public and revising principles and practices in line with the recommendations of internal and external experts (Stansbury & Barry, 2007). Moreover, as Paine (1994:111) suggests, values-based approaches, like Foucault’s ethics can be ‘based on the concept of self-governance’.

Again then, a redirection in management of business ethics away from compliance towards integrity puts greater emphasis on the moral capacities of the individual. However, Foucault’s ethics suggest a somewhat different path to achieve self-governance. Instead of encouraging employees to live up to a set of core values by training them in what the organization stands for, or even facilitating constructive criticism of these values in order to generate a more adaptive set of values, the focus would be on providing an enabling environment that facilitated active, creative and innovative processes of subjective *self-formation*. This shifts the focus from the company and its values to the individual. Thus, ethics would become an emotional, embodied, lived experience rather than an instrumental response to externally constructed values *or* rules.

Educating For Ethical Subjectivity

Finally, it is clear that this focus on self-governance in the management of business ethics also has implications for how a Foucauldian business ethics pedagogy might be conceived. At a time when the subject of management education in ethics is on the agenda, especially in the context of recent scandals (e.g. Ghoshal, 2003, 2005; Ethical Corporation, 2006; Starkey and Tiratsoo, 2007), we might ask whether and how Foucault's ethics could translate into the classroom, and if so, what benefits and drawbacks they might present. Again, this is not a straightforward task as Foucault actually said little in his work about education directly, although schools were one of the 'carceral' institutions that he discussed in *Discipline and Punish* (Marshall, 1996)⁹. As such, we have to discern what is implicit rather than explicit in his work about the philosophy of education, and how one can be educated for ethical subjectivity.

If we leave aside some of the deeper critique of education establishments that is present in Foucault's middle period in order to focus on issues specific to business ethics pedagogy, two important themes emerge here. First, taking Foucault's ethics seriously would mean that education or training for students and practitioners in business ethics would avoid the usual attempts to transmit particular ethical rules or dictums, and would focus instead on encouraging skepticism in the face of such academic truths. Roth (1992: 692) for instance suggests that:

We have to recognize that in our efforts as teachers to summarize, simplify, or unify the propositions of our discipline, we inevitably exclude or push to the margin all that is atypical or disconfirming. Although we run the risk of seeming discordant, we ought to acknowledge to our students the inconsistencies and competing discourses within our fields. Too often we present subject matter as if it were uncontested, or, even more constrictive, uncontestable. Alerting students to the

dissension in our field serves to loosen the grip of systematization and sets us both on the road to uncertainty.

For those of us practiced in the teaching of multiple ethical theories, this will not be much of a departure, except that we would move beyond an analysis of particular theories' strengths and weaknesses to a discussion of how certain normative frames might act as disciplinary forces. This, of course, goes beyond 'ethical' theory to broader management theory and could involve, for example, the contestation of the hegemony of economics (or more broadly rationality) as the touchstone of truth and relevance (see for example Ghoshal, 2005). The task is a philosophical one, an 'endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known' (Foucault, 1985b: 9).

More importantly, though, for articulating an education project less focused on 'endless critique' is the more fundamental challenge raised by Foucault's ethics for how we might educate for self-governance and the creation of an 'ethical self'. As Infinito (2003: 67) argues:

[S]elf-construction, the constant critique and shaping of our persons as ethical beings, must be considered a central aim of moral pedagogy. Such an education involves more than the simple adoption of categorical truths. Creating an ethical self requires ongoing judgments about how one responds to the condition of others and who one would be in the world. It is these judgments that students need to recognize, examine, practice, and critically reflect on, in order to grow as educated and compassionate people.

Education in business ethics would therefore involve students and teachers in critical reflection of themselves – not to find a one 'true self', but to take oneself as an object of knowledge so as to transform and correct oneself – 'to release oneself from one self' (Foucault, 1997: xxxviii). Again, a good starting point here is the idea of moral

imagination, insofar as this approach involves encouraging students to be self-reflective and to enact a ‘disengaged view from somewhere’ (Werhane: 1998: 89). This is about enabling us to experiment with other modes of relating to situations and problems rather than accepting our taken-for-granted conceptual schema. But a Foucauldian pedagogy of ethics would push this further – to push us to learn how to refuse what we have become as a result of the effects of power to define the ‘truth’ of our subjectivity (Foucault, 1982). Again, we can see parallels here with Socrates where ‘the central task of education ... is to confront the passivity of the pupil, challenging the mind to take charge of its own thought’ (Nussbaum, 1997: 28-9).

Once more, it becomes difficult to discern specific pedagogical strategies in this project, although the goals of a new business ethics pedagogy would be relatively clear – to enable subjects ‘to give laws to themselves’, and provide them with ‘skills to exercise power’ in order to minimize domination, and offer coaching in techniques of self-management (Wain, 1996). Business ethics teaching would become about the management of one’s own subjectivity rather than the management of others. But this, of course, is a risky path to take in the context of business school education, where students may interpret this as an invitation to establish their own arbitrary practices of management. The approach can only conceivably work in the context of the aforementioned critique of domination and disciplinary practices.

CONCLUSION

These are it has to be said preliminary sketches of how Foucault’s ethics might be

fruitfully applied to theorizing, practicing, and teaching business ethics. As we have already suggested, there are few clues in Foucault's work as to how people in contemporary organizations might perform technologies of the self in order to realize a Foucauldian ethics of practice. What we hope we have shown though is that Foucault's ethics have a potential part to play in developing contemporary approaches to business ethics such as moral imagination and virtue ethics, and indeed that a serious engagement with his ideas can point to lacuna in those theories, or offer potential redirections of these theoretical developments.

Foucault's major contribution to social theory is his unrelenting attempt to deconstruct modern definitions of what it means to be a subject. In the later work, this emerges as an ethics of practice, in which technologies of the self are developed through which individuals and groups might define themselves, and thereby utilize their freedom to be other than what discipline or domination demands. Foucault's concern is therefore to fashion a view of ethics, rooted not in laws or codes of a quasi-juridical kind, but in what he calls the 'mode of subjectivation' (Foucault, 1985a), the way we relate to ourselves and to others.

Foucault's ethics have featured little in business ethics to date, and perhaps this is understandable given the focus on domination and docility in his most well-known work, and a turn towards sexuality and desire during the later period. However, what we hope to have shown in this paper is that for those interested in power, the ethical self, freedom, and virtue, Foucault provides important, if not fully realized, contributions. There are necessary limits to an approach that resolutely refuses (for internally consistent reasons) to offer us any clear rules or recipes for action, especially in terms of its practical and

pedagogical implications. There are also limitations evident in Foucault's turn towards a Nietzschean will-to-power, and a potentially self-absorbed form of self-governance, especially if de-coupled from an adequate understanding of domination and discipline. But ultimately, at a time when business ethics is emerging as a mainstream body of accumulated knowledge with its own rules, interdictions and high priests, and when firms, professional associations and international bodies are rapidly rolling out codes of conduct to 'solve' ever more visible ethical problems, the example offered by Foucault to 'think differently' and to explore the conditions of our freedom, is a legacy we think should not be ignored.

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¹ The reason that Foucault almost always links the term power to knowledge is not because he subscribes to a very commonsense view that knowledge is power. He explicitly rejects such a determination. Rather he uses a slash between power/knowledge because he believes that the exercise of power invariably draws on knowledge since that enhances effectiveness and legitimacy but also that when power is exercised it also produces new knowledge not least in the effects it has on subjectivity (Knights, 2002).

² It is interesting that organization studies has tended to neglect not only the later work of Foucault but also his earlier work in favour of the middle period where the focus is more obviously organizational (Knights, 1992; 2002; Jones, 2003).

³ This is the argument made even more forcefully by Derrida (1992) that ethical behaviour demands the freedom to choose not simply to comply with rules or conform to power.

⁴ For a detailed account of Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France and elsewhere, particularly in relation to his views on ethics, see Paras (2006).

⁵ For an excellent critique of the liberal individualistic conception of freedom see Schwartz (1986).

⁶ Citation in quote refers to Foucault, Michel (1988). The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom. In James Bernauer and David Rasmussen (eds) *The Final Foucault*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

⁷ For a fuller account of the methodology of genealogy, see for example Prado (2000)

⁸ This is not to say that Habermas, for one, has not explored the individual moral subject as well as institutions, communication, and other structures, even power (e.g. Habermas, 1990). Indeed, there is some convergence as well as divergence between the two philosophers in this respect. However, Foucault's coupling of such a forthright analysis of discipline with a later concern for the subject offers something of a unique juxtaposition.

⁹ Not surprisingly perhaps, philosophers of education, like organization scholars, have tended to focus on Foucault's middle period rather than on his later period concerned with ethics and technologies of the self.