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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.

³ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and his Shadow," in *Signs* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1954).

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.”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 44.

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, “Revelation in the Jewish Tradition,” in Sean Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 206.

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"⁶ 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

⁷ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2005), p. 103.

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

⁹ Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self," in Jeremy R. Carrette (ed.), *Religion and Culture: Michel Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 162.

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.¹¹ 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

¹¹ Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," p. 288.

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

¹² Kenneth Wain, "Foucault: The Ethics of Self-Creation and the Future of Education," in Michael A. Peters & Tina (A.C.) Besley (eds.), *Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 178.

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

¹³ Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p. 80.

¹⁴ Simon Critchley, "Introduction," in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, p. 21.

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

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom. An Interview with Michel Foucault on January, 20, 1984,” in Bernauer and Rasmussen (eds.), *The Final Foucault* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), p. 4.

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.¹⁶ 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

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.”¹⁷ 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.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume III: The Care of the Self* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 182.

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.”¹⁸ While Foucault argues the other is a potential focus of our responsibility, “it is always secondary to his preoccupation with the self.”¹⁹ 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

¹⁸ Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility,” in Jeremy Moss (ed.), *The Late Foucault* (London: Sage, 1998), p. 87.

¹⁹ Barry Smart, “Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility,” p. 89.

made aware of its egoist ways and turned into the ethical subject.”²⁰ 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.”²¹ 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.”²²

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

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."²³ 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."²⁴

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

²³ Barry Smart, "Foucault, Levinas and the Subject of Responsibility," p. 88.

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."²⁶

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

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.”²⁷

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.”²⁸ 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

²⁷ Edith Wyschogrod, “Towards a Postmodern Ethics,” p. 63.

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 51.

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

²⁹ Edith Wyschogrod, "Towards a Postmodern Ethics," p. 63.

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!”³²

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

³² Benda Hofmeyr, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas*, p. 246.

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.”³³

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.”³⁴ 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

³³ Michel Foucault, “Preface to Transgression,” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 33-4.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 45.

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.

³⁵ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, p. 167.

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.'*³⁶

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

³⁶ Howard Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 77.

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?"³⁷ 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

³⁷ Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, p. 206.

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.”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.”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.”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

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

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 212.

⁴¹ Johanna Oksala, *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

⁴² David Couzens Hoy, *Critical Resistance*, p. 65.

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.”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 skeptical 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 (*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

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *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

⁴⁴ Joseph Pearson (ed.), Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles, CA, Semiotext (e), 2001), p. 169.

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 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

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,”⁴⁸ 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.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ More

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, “Language and Proximity,” p. 170.

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.”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.

⁵¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *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 London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 255.

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."⁵³ 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."⁵⁴

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

⁵³ Jill Robbins (ed.), *Is It Righteous To Be?*, p. 236

⁵⁴ Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 58.

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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ For instance, in Seneca, the mentor is asked to help the students not to be *stultitia* who have muddled minds that

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.”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.”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.

⁵⁷ Thomas Coelen, “Pedagogy and Self-Concern in Master-Student Relationships in Antiquity,” in Michael A. Peters & Tina (A.C.) Besley (eds.), *Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 51.

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.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

⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *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

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."⁶¹ 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."⁶²

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

⁶¹ Sharon Todd, *Learning from the Other*, p. 30.

⁶² 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.⁶³ 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

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

practice.”⁶⁴

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.”⁶⁵ 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

⁶⁴ See James Bernauer and Michael Mahon, “The Ethics of Michel Foucault,” in Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, p. 155.

⁶⁵ See James D. Faubion (ed.), *Michel Foucault--Power* (New York: The New Press, 2000), p. 275.

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

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 1* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 287.

disciple the possibility of caring for the disciple's care for himself."⁶⁷ 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

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”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 *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 (*Otherwise than Being*) this explanation becomes increasingly implausible.”⁶⁹ In particular, Hofmeyr argues that in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas shows that the double-sidedness of desire as “separation *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.”⁷⁰ In *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 *being* on the basis of the

⁶⁸ Alphonso Lingis, “The Sensuality and the Sensitivity,” p. 227.

⁶⁹ Benda Hofmeyr, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas*, p. 267

⁷⁰ Benda Hofmeyr, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas*, p. 202.

Other who is exterior to him.”⁷¹ Although enjoyment might lead to egoism, it also presupposes “the welcoming of the Other.”⁷² 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.”⁷³ 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 The

⁷¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 149.

⁷² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 146.

⁷³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 148.

⁷⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 134.

⁷⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 150.

⁷⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 148-9.

subject's interiority⁷⁷ (egoism, enjoyment, sensibility) can enable the subject to "await and welcome the revelation of transcendence."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."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 *Totality and Infinity* differs from the one described in *Otherwise than Being*. In *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."⁸⁰ It "provokes separation not by some force of opposition and dialectical evocation, but by the feminine grace of its radiance."⁸¹ By contrast, in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas regards the intervention of the other as not a "gentle intervention"; rather it is a "harsh strike"⁸² towards the subject that kidnaps the subject as "hostage." In the other words, Levinas understands the other's intervention

⁷⁷ Levinas defines interiority as a radical separation, which in on way deprives the subject from contact with the other.

⁷⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 150.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 151.

⁸⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 150.

⁸¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 151.

⁸² Emmanuel Levinas, *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.”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-affectation which is a necessary condition for the possibility of being affected by the other.”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

⁸³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 215.

⁸⁴ Benda Hofmeyr, *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.”⁸⁵ 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.

⁸⁵ Benda Hofmeyr, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Foucault and Levinas*, p. 198.

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.