[DRAFT: THIS VERSION MAY DIFFER IN MINOR WAYS FROM THE PUBLISHED VERSION (FORTHCOMING IN *FOUCAULT AND PHILOSOPHY,* ED. T. O'LEARY, BLACKWELL), IN WHICH CASE THE LATTER SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS AUTHORITATIVE]

The 'Death of Man': Foucault and Humanism

Like many of the '–ism' words criticised by Heidegger, humanism is a concept which is as widely used as it is indeterminate. Both its extension and value are subject to significant variations. In the English-speaking world, it is often associated with an optimistic and secular view of the world which asserts the privilege of human beings over non organic (or organic but non human) entities and defends the rights of human beings to happiness and to the development of their individual potential.[1] Yet on the continent, and in particular in France and Germany, at the time of the 'death of man' humanism was seen by many as a dirty word, partly because of its implied anthropocentrism and partly due to some dubious political associations (the term was used by totalitarian regimes to justify their practices).[2] After the post war enthusiasm for existentialism a wave of anti-humanism arose, led in Germany by Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism*, which denounced the understanding of the essence of man presupposed by humanism as metaphysical. In France, the controversy about humanism was closely associated with the debates surrounding structuralism and with four main figures: Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Althusser and Foucault himself. Other players in the field of anti-humanism were literary theorists such as M. Blanchot (who emphasised the self generating character of language over the role of the writer in the production

[1] Thus the American Humanist Association defines humanism as 'a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism and other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfilment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.' (http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/). Its British counterpart states that 'the Humanist view of life is progressive and optimistic, in awe of human potential, living without fear of judgement and death, finding enough purpose and meaning in life, love and leaving a good legacy.' (http://www.humanism.org.uk/site/cms/). See also S. Puledda, *Interpretations of Humanism: Western Humanisms from the Renaissance to the Present,* Latitude Press (1997), p. 1 ('we find the term *humanism* used to indicate any current of thought that affirms the centrality, value and dignity of the human being or that manifests a primary concern in the life and situation of the human being in the world') or K. Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism,* London: Hutchinson and co, 1992, p.1 sq.

[2] See for example: 'you know that this is precisely this humanism which served to justify, in 1948, Stalinism and the hegemony of Christian democracy, that it is the very humanism that can be found in Camus or in Sartre's existentialism (…). This humanism has constituted, in a certain way, the small prostitute of the whole thought, the whole culture, the whole morals of the last twenty years' (DE I 615-616 [RC: 99]). Interestingly, Sartre shares some of these views: 'we have no right to believe that humanity is something to which we could set up a cult, after the manner of Auguste Comte. The cult of humanity ends in Comtian humanism, shut-in upon itself, and – this must be said – in Fascism' (Sartre 1973: 55).

of literary pieces[3]) or historians from the Ecole des Annales like F. Braudel.[4] Although these thinkers differed widely in their disciplines, assumptions and conclusions, they all denied the primacy of man, be it as an epistemological starting point (the subject as the foundation of all possible knowledge, as in Husserlian phenomenology) or as a practical agent (freedom as the main operator and focus of historical development as in Hegelian history). Correlatively, they emphasised the part played by unconscious structures in the determination of thought and behaviour: the 'author' was redefined by Foucault as a 'function' of the texts rather than their source[5]; Althusser re-described human agents as 'bearers' (*Träger*) of historical determination, not as the actors of history.[6] Braudel introduced the idea of multiple durations at work in history, of which 'eventful' [événementielle], human history was only the most superficial.[7]

Thus French anti-humanism entailed, generally speaking, a denunciation both of foundationalism and of an Enlightenment-inspired, progressivist view of history as the result of the actions of autonomous agents. In Foucault's case, much of the controversy focused on his provocative statements about man being a 'recent invention' promised to an imminent 'death' (OT: 386) and threatened with erasure like a 'face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea' (OT: 387). [8] Yet it would be mistaken to think that there was much uniformity in the anti-humanist camp, or that there was agreement on a positive definition of an alternative model to humanism.

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[3] See for example one of Blanchot's seminal texts, *The Space of Literature,* University of Nebraska Press; 1990.

[4] Both Blanchot and Braudel were central to Foucault's interests. He wrote a short book about the first (*Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from the Outside*, Zone Books; 1990). The *Archaeology of Knowledge* opens with a reference to 'great motionless grounds' recently uncovered in history, a clear allusion to Braudel's work on duration. Foucault mentions Braudel explicitly in DE I : 607 (RC 92): 'one of the most famous contemporary historians, Braudel, cannot be seen as a partisan of linear history, in which consciousness plays a dominant part'. On Foucault's views on language and his relation to Blanchot, see for example B. Han, 'Literature and the Thought of the Outside in Foucault and Blanchot', in the *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* (vol. 3, fall 1994). On the Ecole des Annales, see F. Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the 'Annales',* Chicago: university of Illinois Press, 1994.

[5] Foucault : 'Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?', DE I: 789-820 [AME : 205-222].

[6] 'The structure of the relations of production determines the *places* and *functions* occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of such places, insofar as they are the supports (*Träger*) of these functions. The true 'subjects' (in the sense of the constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearances, the 'real men' but the *definition and distribution of these places and functions'* (Althusser, *Reading Capital,* London: 1968, p. 180).

[7] See for example F. Braudel : Preface to the *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* Fontana/Collins, 1975.

[8] See also various passages in OT : 'It is not so long ago when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not.' [322]; 'No philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination and the passions, had ever encountered, in the 17th or 18th centuries, anything like man: for man did not exist (any more than life, language or labour).' [344]; 'Man is a recent invention within [European culture].' [386]

Foucault categorically denied that he was a structuralist[9]; he claimed to differ from Lévi-Strauss because of his interest in actual, not virtual systems[10]; and unlike Althusser, he did not believe that our historical development is dependent solely on causal determination.[11] Yet (as illustrated by the above distinctions) he was often keener on defining his position a contrario than on providing a positive set of criteria. Furthermore the polemical context of the quarrel led him and others to publish occasionally excessive statements which in retrospect stand out more by virtue of their provocative character than because of their intellectual perspicaciousness. In this paper, I shall try to avoid rhetorical heat, and will refrain from defending either humanism or anti-humanism. I am more interested in the debate itself. Controversial, often acerbic dialogues between contemporaries are not rare in the history of philosophy — think Hegel-Schelling; Heidegger-Carnap; Rawls-Habermas. Yet the philosophical interest of such controversies often lies as much in what is presupposed by each of the interlocutors as in what is explicitly said. If one examines the assumptions of each proponent, such debates often appear to rest on mutual misunderstandings; and unless these are identified, it is impossible for the external observer to take a stand on the issues in question or to discern whether the heat of the intellectual battle covers the possibility of a deeper agreement.

Thus I do not propose to enter the debate about the death of man but to bring to light its theoretical underpinnings. To my knowledge, this hasn't been done so far. Those who have written on Foucault's anti-humanism have tended to focus on its relation to Heidegger's critique of cartesianism and/or on the Foucault/Habermas controversy.[12] In an important paper,[13] N. Frazer

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[9] See AK, chapters 1 and 5.

[10] See AK, chapter 5.

[11] See for example : 'Sartre and Garaudy want me to talk exclusively about causality. But precisely because of this they narrow down the field of exploration (...). In the *Order of Things* I haven't covered at all this vertical dimension [the 'relations which can exist between a type of knowledge and social, political, economic and historical conditions in which such knowledge is constituted], only the horizontal dimension' (DE I : 656). This concern for avoiding reductionism was maintained throughout Foucault's work: see DE IV: 77 [P: 278]: 'the type of intelligibility which I am trying to produce cannot be reduced to the projection of say, a socio-economic history, over a natural phenomenon so that it appears as the necessary and extrinsic product of this cause'.

[12] For an example of the first, see D. Hoy, 'Power, Repression, Progress: Foucault, Lukes and the Frankfurt School' (*Triquarterly* 52, Fall 1981, 43-63); for an example of the second, see A. Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, transl. K. Baynes, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, chapter 6. There is also a significant amount of feminist critiques of humanism (often putting forward variations of the idea that 'masculine' values such as autonomy and freedom must be supplemented with 'feminine' values such as care or relatedness), some of which make explicit references to Foucault. See for example Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body*, New York: Routledge, 1991, chapter 5. As in the case of the above, such criticisms tend to focus on Foucault's genealogical work.

[13] N. Frazer, 'Michel Foucault: A 'Young Conservative'?', in *Critique and Power,* ed. M. Kelly, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994, p.185-211.

distinguished between three possible grounds for Foucault's rejection of humanism: a) 'conceptual or philosophical' (humanism as too entangled in Western subject-focused metaphysics), b) strategic (the appeal to humanist values as covering up strategies of domination) and c) normative (humanism as being intrinsically objectionable, on the ground that subjection is per se a form of subjugation). These three possibilities are supposed to correspond to the three main stages of Foucault's philosophical development (archaeology, genealogy and the history of subjectivity). With respect to this useful nomenclature, the reading I propose in this paper is, roughly speaking, conceptual: it argues that Foucault's rejection of humanism was motivated by his philosophical analyses of the aporia of the anthropological turn and the analytic of finitude, and that some of the bitterness of the 'death of man' debate was due to the fact that such analyses were grievously misunderstood by his opponents. However my position differs from Frazer's in at least three respects: a) it focuses mostly on Foucault's early work, b) it does not argue from parallels between Foucault and Heidegger but seeks to identify internally the philosophical grounds for Foucault's rejection of humanism, and c) contrary to Frazer, I suggest that the later Foucault's work, far from being a hardening of his early position (from a 'merely conceptual', as she puts it, to a strongly normative but in her view untenable position), offers the possibility of a reconciliation by sketching out a position which, rather than rejecting tout court such values as freedom or self-creation, upholds them as ideals but seeks to construe them in non metaphysical ways.

Let us first get an idea of the nature and tone of the debate. The extent of the indignation and misunderstandings generated by Foucault's somewhat conspicuous declarations about the death of man can be illustrated by the following passages, taken from two of the most vocal proponents of humanism: Garaudy, dubbed a 'soft' Marxist (DE I 541), and Sartre, the '19th century philosopher'[14].

> When he tells us that man is a creation of the end of the 18th century, I would like Foucault to explain us where he is going to locate Augustine's *Confessions* or even the research of the Greek fathers who, from the notion of the divine person, and then from Christology, arrived at the notion of the human person. (Garaudy 1994: 380)

> 'Man' does not exist, and Marx had rejected him long before Foucault or Lacan when he said: 'I don't see any man, I only see workers, bourgeois, intellectuals'. If one persists in calling 'subject' a sort of substantial I (...) then the subject has been dead for a long time. But the

[14] 'The *Critique de la raison dialectique* is the magnificent and pathetic effort of a man from the 19th century to think the 20th century. From that perspective, Sartre is the last Hegelian, I would even say the last Marxist'. (DE I : 542).

> initial decentering which makes man disappears behind the structures implies in itself a form of negativity, and man surges from this negation. There is a subject, or a subjectivity if you prefer, as soon as there is an effort to overcome while retaining a given situation. (Sartre 1994: 70)

While they are both opposed to Foucault's conclusions in the *Order of Things*, it is doubtful that Garaudy and Sartre would have agreed as to why. Firstly, they each have something quite different in mind when they speak of 'man': Garaudy is referring to the religious notion of the human person as a bearer of rights endowed with a special status (a conception further developed by Kant's focus on the capacity of rational beings for self-government and the moral worth that derives from it, by opposition to 'mere things' which have a price but no intrinsic value). By contrast, Sartre rejects such moral abstractions and sees man in a secular way, as 'surging from negation'. This 'surge' alludes to *Being and Nothingness'* definition of consciousness as a nihilating power which separates itself from the world through the very movement by which it projects itself into it. As pure negation, consciousness cannot be identified with any of the contents that are given to it (it has no essence)[15]; nor can it be determined by them. Thus at a historical level, agents may be dependent on their socio-economical insertion (their 'situation') but the latter can be 'overcome' through practical engagement.[16] While there is possible overlap between the two conceptions, it is clear that they do not coincide. Secondly, the grounds of the two objections are different: Garaudy is accusing Foucault of historical inaccuracy[17] while Sartre is defending the primacy of freedom both as a causally determining principle and as an historical explanatory category, thus rejecting the idea that agents may be unconsciously determined by structures which pre-exist them and on which they have no power. But beyond these differences, the crucial issue is that both critics miss the point of what Foucault means by 'man': he does not refer to the 'human person', nor to any 'substantial I', nor to free consciousness. To understand this, one needs

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[15] (Of course, the question is open of whether one can successfully refute the idea of an essence of man and yet provide a definition of man. That it doesn't pick out empirical features does not mean that no essential properties are assigned).

[16] 'For me man is the product of the structure but only insofar as he overcome it. (; Man receives the structures (…) but he receives them insofar as he is himself engaged in history, and engaged in such a way that he cannot not destroy them to constitute new ones which, in turn, will determine him' (Sartre 1994: 72).

[17] A line of attack in which he wasn't alone. See for example: G. S. Rousseau: 'Whose Enlightenment? Not Man's. The Case of Michel Foucault', *Eighteenth Century Studies,* n°6 (1972-73): 283-286; G. Huppert, 'Divinatio and Eruditio: Thoughts on Foucault', *History and Theory,* n°3 (1974). For Foucault's responses, see: 'Monstrosities in Criticism', DE II: 214 sq [the English translation by R.J. Matthews can be found in *Diacritics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1971), pp. 57-60].

to look at the complex account of the connection between the appearance of 'man', humanism and anthropology proposed by the *Order of Things.*

The first thing to note is that for the early Foucault humanism has a very specific, narrow referent. This is indicated by his rather surprising historical reconstruction of its birth, which is referred to the Enlightenment[18] and not, as is more traditional, to the revival and reinterpretation of the Ciceronian notion of *humanitates* during the Renaissance[19]: thus the first humanists on Foucault's list are not Rabelais, Montaigne or Pico Della Mirandola but Kant, Hegel and Marx.[20] 'The Humanist movement', he tells us, 'dates from the end of the 19th century. Secondly, when one looks a little closely at the cultures of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, one realises that man literally has no place in them. Culture is then preoccupied with God, the world and the resemblance of things' (ibidem).[21] Garaudy would probably have thrown up his hands in the air in despair at this statement, which flies in the face of common sense and of the received view of the history of humanism. After all there were human beings on this planet long before the 19th century, and references about man abound in Renaissance and subsequent texts (and prior writings such as *Genesis…*). To understand this paradox, one needs to locate Foucault's analyses at the appropriate level: 'at the archaeological level, which reveals the general, historical a priori of each of these branches of knowledge [the human sciences], modern man — that man assignable in his corporeal, labouring and speaking existence — is only possible as a configuration of finitude' (OT: 317). As we shall see, the situation is complicated by the fact that the new understanding of finitude itself is referred to… man.[22] But for the moment, note that the shift to the archaeological level provides us with the key to understanding Foucault's provocative statements about the death of man: one must distinguish between surface understandings of man (for example as a living, working, speaking being) and man as the new historical a priori that underlies our comprehension of the first. Thus 'man's mode of being as constituted in modern thought enables it to play two

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[18] Strictly speaking, this is more or less correct: the *Encyclopedia Britannica* indicates that the word 'humanism' was first employed (as *humanismus*) by 19th-century German scholars to designate the Renaissance emphasis on classical studies in education.

[19] For more traditional interpretations of Renaissance humanism, see Puledda (1997) or Nauert, C, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2006.

[20] Thus Foucault rejects the 'high school' narrative according to which 'humanism would have first appeared during the 16th century, would have been developed through the classical age's reworking of the notion of human nature before finding its crowning point in the development of the positive sciences of man at the end of the 18th century (DE I: 540).

[21] See also : 'insofar as what existed in classical knowledge were representations ordered in a discourse, all the notions that are fundamental for our conception of man, such as that of life, labour and language, had (…) no place. Man existed where discourse became quiet' (DE I: 498 [FL: 16]).

roles: he is at the same time the foundation of all positivities and at the same time present in the element of empirical things. (...) It is not a matter of man's essence in general but simply of that historical a priori which, since the 19th century, has served as an almost self-evident ground for our thought' (OT: 344). Just as each épistémè makes possible the appearance of specific objects and theories, in the same way man in the archaeological sense is the condition of possibility of the current conceptions of man. Yet precisely for this reason, it is not synonymous with any of these understandings: 'Renaissance 'humanism' and Classical 'rationalism' were indeed able to allot human beings a privileged position in the order of the world, but they were not able to conceive of man' (OT: 318). It is because they missed this crucially narrow archaeological meaning in the *Order of Things* that both Sartre and Garaudy failed to understand and thus to criticise Foucault's position adequately. In their defence, such a mistake was facilitated by the fact that Foucault himself used the same term to refer both to the epistemic structure and to its empirical content — in what follows, I shall try to prevent such confusions from arising by referring to the first as 'man' and to the second as man.[23]

Yet so far the distinction between 'man' and man is purely formal. To give it content, and to assess its relevance to humanism, one must elucidate what Foucault actually means by 'man' as the empirico-transcendental double, its connection to anthropology and its role in the analytic of finitude. Let us start with the first. In order to get a grip on the matter, we must remember Foucault's analyses of the previous épistémè, namely that the classical age. Without entering into unnecessary details,[24] his view is that during that period representation was both the ground and the privileged medium of knowledge: to be known was to be represented adequately.[25] Conversely, beings were, at least in principle, fully representable, and the general aim of knowledge consisted in perfecting the best method to differentiate and arrange representations so

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[22] 'Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet, since he is a being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible' (OT: 317).

[23] There is an additional reason for the confusion: while it would be natural, in English, to use the neutral pronoun 'it' to refer to the structure, and the masculine 'he' for man as an empirical agent, in French there is no neutral, except in very few cases (such as 'il pleut' [it is raining] or 'il y a' [there is]). Thus in Foucault's texts the same masculine pronoun is used to denote both the structure ('man') and the individual (man). At the risk of artificiality in translation, I shall try to disentangle this ambiguity inasmuch as possible by substituting the neutral for the masculine when appropriate.

[24] For more details, see for example B. Han, *Foucault's Critical Project: Between the Transcendental and the Historical,* Stanford: Stanford UP: 2001, in particular part I. See also B. Han-Pile, 'Analytic of Finitude and the History of Subjectivity', in the *Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (ed. Gary Gutting, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005)

that they would reflect the real order of things in the world (hence Descartes' emphasis on the establishment of systematic differences between representations and the classical age's obsession with the table as a synoptic form of knowledge). By contrast, the birth of 'man' is due to the Copernican turn, whereby the focus shifted from representations to the representing subject. As it is well known, Kant's new thought was that it might be more profitable, in order to securely ground empirical knowledge and answer the sceptic's challenge, to look into the activity of representing itself, with a view to finding out whether any a priori conditions could be identified that would hold for any possible representational content. If this was the case, then the presence of such universal and necessary constraints on our representations would be enough to guarantee the possibility of their validity in the empirical realm.[26] According to Foucault, this move from the post hoc to the a priori had two notable consequences: firstly, 'the very being of what is represented fell outside of representation itself' (OT: 240). Secondly, and more importantly for our present topic, the Copernican turn gave rise to a new understanding of 'man' as the empirico-transcendental double. As a transcendental subject, 'man' is the foundation of empirical knowledge: to be known is still to be represented, but in order to count as candidates for true knowledge, representations must conform to the epistemic conditions laid out in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental analytic. [27] Yet at the same time, 'man' is also a possible object of representation within the field opened up by such epistemic conditions: thus we represent ourselves in space (we see our own bodies) and in time (we can be conscious of our

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[25] See for example: 'the threshold between Classicism and modernity — (...) let us say between our pre-history and what is still contemporary — had been definitely crossed when words ceased to intersect with representations and to provide a spontaneous grid for the knowledge of things' (OT: 304).

[26] Foucault refers to this attempt in the following passage: 'instead of basing the connection between representations on a foundation arrived at by a sort of internal hollowing out process [a reference to the work of Ideologists such as Condillac], (...) Kant establishes it on the conditions that define its universally valid form. (...) Any connection, if it is to be universal, must have its foundation beyond all experience, in the a priori that renders it possible. Not that it is a question of another world, but of the conditions in accordance with which any representation of the world in general can exist' (OT: 242).

[27] The notion of 'epistemic condition' is borrowed from H. Allison (*Kant's Transcendental Idealism: an Interpretation and Defence,* New Haven: Yale UP, 1983, p. 10-13). It refers to a 'condition that is necessary for the representation of an object or an objective state of affairs'. Allison also refers to such conditions as 'objectivating conditions' as they are that by virtue of which our representations possess objective reality. In the *Critique,* epistemic conditions are comprised of the a priori forms of sensibility (space and time) and of the pure concepts of the understanding (the categories). Such conditions must be distinguished from: a) logical conditions (such as the principle of non contradiction), which rule consistent thinking; b) psychological conditions, which refer to particular aspects of the human cognitive apparatus that help provide a genetic account of why we perceive things in certain ways (these can include physiological factors). Contrary to epistemic conditions, these cannot account for the objective validity of a representation (although they may contribute to explaining its empirical formation); c) ontological conditions, namely the conditions of possibility of the being of things.

internal states). In Foucault's words, 'man appeared as an object of possible knowledge (...) and at the same time as the being through which all knowledge is possible' (DE I: 607 [RC: 93]). Note, however, that at this point the two aspects of the double are neatly dissociated — thus in the *Critique* there is no overlap between the empirical 'I' of our self apprehension in the form of the internal sense on the one hand, and the transcendental 'I' of the 'I think' of transcendental apperception on the other.

Yet the analytic of finitude threatens this neat separation between the two halves of the double and gives the Copernican turn its further, anthropological twist. This, for Foucault, was prefigured in Kant's shift from the first *Critique* to the *Anthropology:* 'from Kant onwards (...) there is nothing but finitude, and it is in this sense that the Kantian critique carried with itself the possibility — or the peril — of anthropology' (DE I: 446 [AME: 257]). To understand this peril, one must, again, back track a little to the pre-Kantian understanding of finitude. Foucault points out that during the classical age, the notion of the infinite was both central and primary: thus for Descartes one can prove the existence of God by the presence of the idea of the infinite in the finite. The underlying assumption is that the infinite has ontological pre-eminence over the finite: in accordance with the Aristotelian/Thomist view that an effect cannot be superior to its cause, the only possible conclusion is that the idea of the infinite was placed in us by God. In a reversal of the Greek understanding of the *apeiron,* during the classical age the finite stands in a relation of ontological subordination to and logical derivation from the infinite. By contrast, for Foucault the hallmark of the anthropological turn is that human finitude, instead of being subordinated to God's infinity, becomes self-foundational: 'our culture', he tells us, 'crossed the threshold beyond which we recognise our modernity when finitude was conceived in an interminable cross-reference with itself. (...) Modern culture can conceive of man because it conceives of the finite on the basis of itself' (OT: 317). To understand this new self reference of finitude, let's turn to the following passage:

> In one sense, man is governed by labour, life and language: his concrete existence finds its determinations in them. (...) [Yet] all those contents (...) have positivity within the space of knowledge (...) only because they are thoroughly imbued with finitude. For they would not be there (...) if man (...) was trapped in the mute (...) opening of animal life; but nor would they posit themselves in the acute angle that hides them from their own direction if man could traverse them without residuum in the lightning flash of an infinite understanding. That is to say that each of these forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of his own finitude. Moreover, the latter is not the most completely purified essence of positivity, but that upon the basis of which it is possible for

> positivity to arise. At the foundation of all the empirical positivities (...), we discover a finitude — which is in a sense the same (...) and yet is radically other. (OT: 313-4).

The key to this difficult excerpt lies in distinguishing between two different senses of finitude (empirical and transcendental) and of determination (causal and epistemic[28]). The 'governance' of life, labour and language over our 'concrete existence' gives us a hint about the nature of what I have called elsewhere empirical finitude.[29] It refers to causal determinations and resides in the fact that human beings are determined by various processes in which they find themselves enmeshed from the day of their birth and over which they have little control. Each in their own way, such processes disclose various aspects of our empirical finitude: we cannot alter our biochemistry so as to become immune to illness or aging, nor can we use a private language. Thus labour, life and language are the 'forms in which man can learn that he is [empirically] finite'. But such forms are also objects of knowledge (further refined in such disciplines as biology, economics or linguistics). In this, they are dependent on the transcendental aspect of 'man' which defines the conditions under which all empirical objects are epistemically determined. Life, language and labour, which are part of the limitations that bear causally on empirical finitude, only 'have positivity within the space of knowledge' because they are 'thoroughly imbued with finitude': yet crucially, such finitude must now be conceived of at the transcendental level. Foucault refers it to our impossibility of 'traversing [such contents] without residuum in the lightning flash of an infinite understanding'. This is clearly an allusion to Kant's definition of the *intuitus originarius* as the sort of intellect which would not be dependent on the reception of sensory material and could by itself produce a fully spontaneous knowledge of its object. Such an intellect would be infinite ('the lightning flash of an infinite understanding') and acquire an immediate and perfect knowledge of its objects ('without residuum'). Yet while such intellectual intuition may be appropriate to characterise God's mode of knowing, it is not open to human beings. Thus transcendental finitude is no empirical matter (it is not the 'completely purified essence of positivity'); it resides in the fact that we cannot form any empirical knowledge unless we receive some external input, usually

[28] A determination is causal if it refers to the action of a cause, in such a way that the existence of the effect depends on that of the cause and the cause must be chronologically prior to (or at least simultaneous with) the effect. By contrast, a determination is epistemic (in an Allisonian sense) if it refers to the application of an a priori condition to the representation of an object. Such determination has no efficacious power and does not occur in time (although they can be defined in isolation of any given empirical content, epistemic conditions do not pre-exist their objects but are instantiated in them): it is a condition of intelligibility, not of existence.

[29] See B. Han-Pile, Heidegger and Foucault on Kant and Finitude', in A. Milchman (ed.), *Critical Encounters : Heidegger/Foucault,* (Indianapolis: Indiana UP), 2003.

through time and space but at least through time: although we are capable of spontaneous activity (for example in synthesising the manifold under the pure concepts of reason), the process whereby we acquire knowledge is not fully active. Yet precisely because it is thus limited, transcendental finitude provides the epistemic conditions ('that upon which it is possible for positivity to arise') which allow the contents that causally determine us as empirical beings to enter the space of knowledge. Note, crucially, that transcendental finitude differs from its empirical counterpart in that the limitation it entails can be analytically deduced from the very concept of the transcendental as a *standpoint* (with implies a specific perspective and thus limiting conditions, by opposition to a God's eye view which would not be limited in such a way). By contrast, empirical finitude can only be understood synthetically, from empirical observations about the nature of human beings as living or speaking entities.

Thus 'at the very heart of empiricity, there is indicated the obligation to work backwards to an analytic of finitude, in which man's being will be able to provide a [transcendental] foundation (...) for all these forms that indicate to him that his is not [empirically] infinite' (OT: 315). The problem, however, is that the ambiguity of 'man', which both separates and unites the empirical and the transcendental, causes the two forms of finitude to overlap by means of an implicit shift which makes epistemic determination ultimately dependent on its empirical, causal counterpart: the relation between transcendental and empirical finitude becomes a vicious circle. This shift is evoked, albeit somewhat obscurely, in the rest of the passage I originally quoted:

> [313] And he, as soon as he thinks, merely unveils himself in the form of a being who is already, in a necessarily subjacent density, in an irreducible anteriority, a living being, and instrument of production, a vehicle for words which exist before him. All these contents (...) traverse him as if he were merely an object of nature.

Note the multiple temporal locutions at work in this quote ('as soon as he thinks', 'already', 'in an irreducible anteriority', 'which exist before him'). It may be tempting to understand the anteriority they connote from a purely empirical point of view, in which case the passage would refer to the empirical genesis of thought. Thought itself would be seen in a naturalistic way, as causally determined by empirical conditions (for example neuro-chemical processes that are specific to man as an empirical being). Yet the passage also indicates that 'man', although 'traversed' by empirical contents, is not 'merely an object of nature'. As we saw, the reason for this lies in the possibility of considering 'man' from a transcendental perspective. From such a standpoint, however, the temporal locutions acquire a new referent: they mark the opening of the epistemic field. By definition, such an opening should not itself be temporal — Foucault himself

points out that in the *First Critique* representation has its 'foundation *beyond all experience*, in the a priori that renders it possible' (OT: 242, my italics). In the 'Transcendental Aesthetics', time is an a priori form of sensibility on which the possibility of conceiving chronological time depends: as a condition of possibility of experience, it cannot feature in the field that it determines.[30] Yet the use of retrospective temporal locutions in the passage quoted cancels out this neat distinction by inscribing the opening of the epistemic field itself within the chronology of empirical time: thus the analytic of finitude is characterised by a paradox of retrospection whereby transcendental finitude is disclosed as pre-existing itself in the form of empirical finitude.[31] Such pre-existence (which Derrida calls 'primitivity' in the case of Husserl's phenomenology) invalidates 'man''s ability to provide a universal and necessary foundation for knowledge. The empirical contents that were previously deemed causally determinant but epistemically determined acquire a 'quasi-transcendental' function (OT: 244)[32] in that they are now viewed as chronologically primary and causally determinant *for epistemic conditions themselves*. Thus man as a transcendental subject 'unveils himself as already there, as a living being' governed by the empirical laws of life, a speaking being using a language that prexists him. In other words, transcendental finitude and empirical finitude are superposed in such a way that the former, rather than being the analytic correlate of the notion of a transcendental standpoint, is now cashed out in terms of the synthetic, empirical limitations (life, language, labour) that bear causally on man. In Foucault's words, 'if man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labour and life [which thus indirectly become epistemically determinant]; (OT: 316). Consequently, this identification of transcendental and empirical finitude, of epistemic and causal determination, invalidates 'man''s ability to provide a universal and necessary foundation for knowledge.

Thus anthropology as an 'analytic of man' (OT: 340) has come to displace Kant's critique. In a well known but obscure passage, Foucault refers to this anthropological doubling over of finitude over itself as the 'Fold':

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[30] This impossibility is illustrated in the first *Critique* by the solution to the antinomy between freedom and causality in the 'Transcendental Dialectics': while our empirical actions are causally determined, inserted in temporal chains in which causes pre-exists their effects, noumenal freedom itself is timeless. Such timelessness is expressed by Kant's reference to the choice of intelligible character, a choice which itself does not intervene within empirical time.

[31] This theme is developed through the study of the 'originary' in Foucault's introduction to Kant's *Anthropology* (recently published in *Anthropologie du point de vue pragmatique et introduction à l'Anthropologie,* Paris: Vrin, 2008. For an interpretation of the text, see B. Han-Pile (2001), part 1, chapter 1.

[32] NB: the English translation is somewhat unfortunate as it renders the French 'quasi-transcendental' with 'transcendental' (with quotation marks).

> [341] By means of this question [was ist der Mensch?] a form of reflection was constituted which is mixed in its levels and characteristic of modern philosophy. (...) It concerns an empirico-transcendental duplication by means of which an attempt is made to make the man of nature, of exchange, or of discourse, serve as the [transcendental] foundation of his own finitude.

A large part of chapter 9 of the *Order of Things* is devoted to outlining the nefarious consequences of this 'empirico-transcendental duplication' both for post-Kantians and contemporary philosophy. Yet it may be advisable to stop at this point. Recall that this long analysis of the analytic of finitude had two aims: firstly, to clarify what Foucault meant by 'man' and thus to expose the misunderstandings underlying the debate about its death. Secondly, to help us understand how Foucault's denunciation of 'man' may ground his rejection of humanism. While the first goal has (hopefully) been achieved, it is not clear that this is the case for the second: even if they accepted Foucault's indictment of anthropology and of the analytic of finitude, humanists could still question its relevance to their own position altogether. Foucault tells us that after 'man' appeared as the 'subject of all knowledge and object of a possible knowledge', 'such an ambiguous situation characterise[d] what one could call the anthropologico-humanist structure of 19th century thought' (DE I: 607 [RC: 93]). Yet what is 'humanist' about this structure? Just as the 'death of man' did not refer to actual human beings, in the same way it is very doubtful that when Sartre or Garaudy — or other humanists attacked by Foucault such as Teilhard de Chardin or Camus — spoke of man they meant the empirico-transcendental double. In the humanist literature, 'man' is much more likely to connote the dignity of the human person as an end in itself, the primacy of the subject (or of consciousness) or human freedom (the list not being exclusive). For example, the last two themes are central to Sartre's own definition of 'existentialist humanism'[33]: 'since man is thus self-surpassing [a reference to man's freedom as a nihilating power] and can grasp objects only in relation to his self-surpassing, he is himself the heart and centre of his transcendence. There is no other universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity' (Sartre 1973: 55). So how (if at all) is Foucault's general denunciation of the 'anthropological sleep' relevant to humanism?

[33] (by opposition to more traditional forms which 'uphold man as the end-in-itself and as the supreme value'. The problem with such views, for Sartre, is that they rely on an essentialist understanding of man: '[it is not] admissible that man should pronounce judgment upon Man; Existentialism dispenses with judgments of this sort: an existentialist will never take man as the end, since man is still to be determined'. (Sartre 1973: 55).

This problem is illustrated by the well-known passage below, which starts from a consideration of anthropology in general and concludes with a vitriolic attack against various forms of humanism:

> [342] Anthropology constitutes perhaps the fundamental arrangement that has governed and controlled the path of philosophical thought from Kant until our own day. This arrangement is essential, since it forms part of our history; but it is disintegrating before our eyes, since we are beginning to recognise and denounce in it, in a critical mode, both a forgetfulness of the opening that made it possible and a stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an imminent new form of thought. To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all those who, on the other hands, refer all knowledge back to the truths of man himself (...), to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can only answer with a philosophical laugh — which means, to a certain extent, a silent one.

For all its rhetorical power (and the undeniable attraction of silent philosophical laughter), the passage looks like a non sequitur: the *Order of Things* has succeeded so well in narrowing the meaning of 'man' to the empirico-transcendental double that the gap between 'man' and its humanist incarnations seems fairly unbridgeable. Yet for Foucault's critique of anthropology to bite on humanism, such a gap needs to be bridged. So what ought we do? One possibility would be to give up on hermeneutic charity altogether and conclude that Foucault is just as guilty of misunderstanding his opponents' position that they were of misreading his. But this may be premature. Alternatively, one could attempt to show that in fact, 'man' and humanist man are synonymous — a dubious strategy in my view since so much of the thrust of Foucault's analyses of the analytic of finitude is precisely devoted to identifying a specific meaning for 'man'. Yet another, perhaps more promising possibility may be to suggest that since the analytic of finitude is supposed to be the epistemic ground of all subsequent thought developments, somehow there must be a relation of entailment between 'man' and man such that the second could be shown to be conceptually or at least historically dependent on the first. If this was the case, then Foucault's criticism of 'man' would have genuine implications for theories that focus on human subjectivity, consciousness or freedom.

As Foucault never addressed this question, it is difficult to do more than provide a few pointers for such a strategy. Let's start by taking stock of the extent of the task. As hinted at by the passage just quoted, Foucault's denunciation of the anthropological turn branches into attacks against two main sets of targets: on the one hand, practical theories grounded in the idea of a 'reign of man' or alternatively announcing his 'liberation', and on the other theoretical questions

about the essence of man assorted with attempts to use the latter as the alpha (a 'starting point in their attempts to reach the truth', e.g. a foundation for knowledge) or omega of knowledge ('refer all knowledge back to the truth of man himself').[34] With respect to this second group, note that such 'referring back' is ambiguous: depending on whether 'man' is understood from a transcendental or empirical perspective, the expression can equally allude to the foundational logic of the Copernican turn (e.g. referring empirical contents to their a priori conditions of possibility) or to the circular dynamic of the analytic of finitude (e.g. referring epistemic conditions themselves to the causal determinations that bear on man as an empirical being). In the first case, 'referring all knowledge back to the truth of man' becomes tantamount to 'using him as a starting point to reach truth'. In this regard, it would hardly be controversial to suggest that most of the post-Kantian developments that focused on the foundational role of the subject followed from the characterisation of the transcendental in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Certainly this is the way Foucault himself reads the rise — and, in his view, failure — of German idealism (in particular Fichte) and both the Husserlian and Sartrian branches of phenomenology.[35] By contrast, if one construes the 'truth of man himself' as referring to the empirical aspect of 'man', then in this case too the proposed strategy can find purchase in that Foucault understands positivism to be doing just this, and consequently to be a naturalistic reduction of 'man's transcendental side to its empirical aspect: thus 'this true discourse finds its foundation and model in the empirical truth whose genesis in nature and in history it retraces, so that one has an analysis of the positivist type' (OT: 320). As I have shown elsewhere (Han-Pile: 2005), Foucault criticises such an attempt for its essentialism, and for unduly turning 'man' into a mere object of nature.

As for the second group, the practical theories that promote the idea of a 'reign' or 'liberation' of man, they too can be seen as an inheritance of the Kantian emphasis on transcendental finitude, historically and possibly conceptually. The early Foucault emphasises the historical filiation and refers such theories to Hegel and Marx (DE I: 540). He targets the use of human freedom as the main hermeneutic category to understand historical development, first in Kant's *Idea for a History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* and then in dialectical form by Hegel and Marx. This also underlies his attacks against more recent movements such as the humanist readings of historical

[34] These themes are developed in numerous other passages such as the following: 'when one analyses the language of man, one doesn't discover the nature, essence or freedom of man. In their stead, one discovers unconscious structures which govern us without our noticing or willing it' ('Interview avec Michel Foucault', 1968, DE I: 656).

materialism[36] and what he calls, by opposition to the Ecole des Annales and the then new 'histoire sérielle', 'continuous history' (AK: 12). The link with the foundational logic of the analytic of finitude is particularly clear in the following passage: 'continuous history is the indispensable correlate of the founding function of the subject: (...) the promise that one day the subject, — in the form of historical consciousness — will once again be able to appropriate [itself] (...). In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the 19th century: to preserve, against all decenterings, the sovereignty of the subject and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism' (AK: 12). Foucault goes on to denunciate various historical surges of this 'founding function of the subject', in the guise of the search for a total history (against Nietzschean genealogy), the anthropologisation of Marx (against such non humanist readings as Althusser's) or the more recent 'reactivation' of dialectical readings of historical development as the 'hard work of freedom' (a thinly veiled allusion to Sartre).[37] The central role attributed to human freedom is deemed doubly nefarious: it leads to the epistemological mistake which consists in ignoring the causal determinations that bear on human beings, and it generates fallacious normative ideals focused on the idea of authenticity as the return to man's true nature[38]: 'because it is a philosophy of history, (...) of human practice (...), of alienation and of reconciliation (...), dialectics promises human beings, so to speak, that they will become true and authentic men. It promises man to man, and insofar as it does this, it is not dissociable from a humanist moral.' (DE I: 540).[39]

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[35] For an interesting but polemical reconstruction, see J. Habermas, 'The Critique of Reason as an Unmasking of the Human Sciences: Michel Foucault', in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987; for a more neutral account, see B. Han-Pile (2005).

[36] Such as Gramsci's and Lukacs. For a useful briefing, see Soper (1997), 96-119.

[37] See for example: 'the analytic reason from the 17th century was essentially characterised by its reference to nature; the dialectical reason of the 19th century developed mostly in reference to existence, i.e. to the problem of the relations between the individual and society, consciousness and history, praxis and life, sense and non sense, life and the inert (DE I: 542).

[38] During his genealogical period, Foucault develops this early criticism of the moralising tendency of humanism by means of a hermeneutics of suspicion which sees it as a cover for the real (and far less moral) intentions of the 18th century prison reformers: 'here the principle takes root that one should never apply 'inhumane' punishment to a criminal who, nevertheless, may well be a traitor and a monster. If the law must now treat in a 'humane' way an individual who is 'outside nature' (…), it is not on account of some profound humanity that the criminal conceals within him, but because of necessary regulation of the effects of power. It is this 'economic' rationality that must calculate the penalty and prescribe the appropriate techniques. 'Humanity' is the respectable name given to this economy and to its meticulous calculations. 'Where punishment is concerned, the minimum is ordered by humanity and counseled by policy' (DP: 92). This corresponds to what Frazer calls the 'strategic' objections to humanism. However, note that such objections do not form the philosophical core of Foucault's denunciation of humanism, which is grounded in his reading of the analytic of finitude.

[39] Note, however, that the link between transcendental finitude and post-Kantian theories of freedom is not merely historical. This is suggested by the later Foucault, although he does not explicitly supply the connection: 'after Descartes one has a subject of knowledge which presents Kant with the problem of

I do not have the space in this paper to examine whether the strategy just outlined is valid. The above suggests that it is at least possible to conceive of the missing links that would show the dependency of the various humanist conceptions attacked by Foucault on 'man'. If such a derivation was indeed correct, and if one accepts Foucault's conclusions in the *Order of Things* about the pernicious character of the analytic of finitude, then there would be some weighty reasons to endorse his criticism of humanism. Yet such reasons are not provided directly by Foucault's analyses and require a large amount of reconstruction. Furthermore, there remain some significant difficulties with the reasons that *are* given. Let me point out three. Firstly, even if one leaves aside the issue of the missing link between 'man' and humanist man, Foucault's negative pronouncements about the value and future of humanism ultimately rest on two factors: his identification of the theoretical flaws of the analytic of finitude, and his belief in the imminent erasure of 'man' as an epistemic structure. Yet the status of the former is made ambivalent by the fact that Foucault moves implicitly from case studies illustrating the failures of the analytic of finitude to apodictic claims about such failures being necessary. This apodictic dimension is denoted by various statements such as the following: 'anthropology as an analytic of man has certainly played a constitutive role in modern thought, since to a large extent we are still not free

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determining the relation between the moral subject and the subject of knowledge. There was considerable discussion during the Enlightenment as to whether these two subjects were different or not. *Kant's solution was to find a universal subject who, insofar as it is universal, can be a subject of knowledge but which also demanded an ethical attitude*' (DE IV: 411 [EST: 279])[39]. One could flesh out this comment by focusing on the introduction of the notion of 'transcendental freedom' in the 'Transcendental Dialectics' and in the 'Canon of Pure Reason'. Such freedom is carefully distinguished from 'practical freedom' (as arbitrium liberum), of which it is the ground. While the latter is a psychological kind of freedom which can ultimately be compatible with determinism (we could be determined by natural causes but experience this, psychologically speaking, as self-determination), transcendental freedom involves a genuine spontaneity (and not just the empirical feeling of the action being spontaneous) which cannot be experienced empirically. Such spontaneity cannot be located within time and must be conceived of as an intelligible, noumenal form of causality (CRP: 332). This is where the connection between freedom and what I have called, following Foucault's hint, transcendental finitude, is the most palpable: the reason lies in the central part played in noumenal causality by transcendental apperception. As it is well known, for Kant the formation of empirical knowledge is made possible by the understanding's spontaneous capacity to unify sensory data under a concept (by judging or 'taking something as'). This involves a special kind of self-awareness which Kant calls 'transcendental apperception' (the 'I think' that accompanies all my representations): such self awareness is non empirical (I cannot observe myself judging) and constitutive of the possibility of our knowing anything empirical. The crucial point, as far as the link between transcendental finitude and freedom is concerned, is that transcendental apperception is equally important for noumenal causality insofar as the latter entails the ability to decide between competing maxims (as opposed to being determined by the 'pathological' inclinations of sensibility. The formulation of such maxims involves first order judgments, and the decision between competing maxims itself takes the form of a second order judgment (the taking of a particular maxim as an imperative). Therefore there are at least some plausible reasons to support the later Foucault's view that post-Kantian theories of freedom are an exploration of transcendental finitude not just historically, but also conceptually.

from it. It became *necessary* at the moment when representations lost the power to determine (...) the interplay of its syntheses and analyses. It was *necessary* for empirical syntheses to be performed elsewhere than within the sovereignty of the 'I think'. They *had to be* required (...) in man's finitude' (OT: 340, my italics). [40] Yet nothing in the *Order of Things* shows that the anthropological turn was necessary, only (at best) that it did happen. As Foucault said himself, the *Critique* carried within itself 'the *peril* of an anthropology' (previously quoted, my italics). That such peril did actualise itself does not mean that it *had to*: facts cannot ground apodictic claims. The most that has been shown is that the coexistence of the empirical and the transcendental within 'man' did encourage the sort of slippage typical of the analytic of finitude, but not that it necessarily caused it. Thus there is a deep ambivalence in the *Order of Things*, which can be read either as a *de facto* narrative that shows the various ways in which the anthropological turn has been detrimental to contemporary thought, or as a *de jure* indictment of 'man' as necessarily leading to the analytic of finitude. This leaves the possibility of rescuing humanism from anthropology: even if s/he accepted Foucault's criticism of 'man', the humanist could still retort that although it is unfortunate that the Copernican turn ended up in the analytic of finitude, there is no reason to think that the empirico-transcendental structure is intrinsically flawed. In other words, the way would still be open for a type of humanism more aware of the dangers of anthropology and keen to preserve the separation of the empirical and the transcendental. Sartre's early phenomenology, with its emphasis on the purely nihilating power of consciousness and the impossibility to identify it with any empirical content whatsoever (in the 'Transcendence of the Ego'), could be read precisely as attempting this sort of theoretical move.

Secondly, similar modal difficulties arise in relation to another problem, namely that of the implicit normativity of Foucault's analyses of anthropology. As it is well known, one of the principles of archaeology as a method lies in its neutrality (by opposition to optimistic narratives focused on progress): for example in the *Order of Things* Foucault is very careful to avoid any value judgment that would give Buffon's natural history pre-eminence over Aldrovandi's mixed recordings of facts, hearsay and myths about animals. Thus Foucault claimed to be an

[40] The same emphasis on apodicticity in present in other passages: thus 'the recent rapprochement [of Marxism and phenomenology] is not of the order of a tardy reconciliation: at the level of archaeological configurations they were both *necessary* — and *necessary* to one another — from the moment the anthropological postulate was constituted, i.e. from the moment when man appeared as an empirico-transcendental doublet' (OT: 322-3, my italics). More generally, the empirico-transcendental replication characteristic of the analytic of finitude itself is seen as necessary: thus man is a 'paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge *necessarily* release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible' (OT: 322, my italics).

'ethnographer of our culture' (DE I: 605 [RC: 91]), a detached theorist retracing the genesis of the current épistémè and identifying the consequences of its being grounded in the 'mode of being' of 'man'. Yet for all his self-professed archaeological neutrality, there is also a strongly normative aspect to his analysis: 'the heaviest inheritance that comes to us from the 19th century — and from which it is time to get rid off — is humanism. (...) Humanism pretends to solve problems that it can't pose!' (DE I: 514). Correlatively, his avowed aim was to 'announce the first deterioration in European history of the anthropological and humanist episode that we have known during the 19th century' (DE I: 502 [FL 16]) and to 'define a method of analysis purged of all anthropologism' (AK: 16).[41] Just like those of the humanists he attacked, Foucault's views oscillate between descriptive and normative registers. Somewhat ironically, this oscillation is one of the reproaches he makes to Sartre: 'Sartre wanted to show that everywhere there is *meaning* [sens]. But (...) this is both an observation and an order' (DE I: 514). Apart from the question of how such normative claims can be grounded[42] (which takes us back to the previous issue of the assertoric/apodictic slippage), this exhibits a tension between the archaeologist's theoretical ideal of detached neutrality and his practice. It is one thing to diagnose the death of 'man', and another to rejoice at — let alone try to precipitate — the demise of the patient…

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[41] The same normativity is at play in Foucault's announcements about the return of language: 'If this same language is now emerging with greater and greater insistence in a unity that we *ought to think* but cannot as yet do so, is this not the sign that the whole of this configuration is about to topple, and that man is in the process of perishing as the being of language continues to shine ever brighter over our horizon?' (OT: 386, my italics).

[42] Many commentators have argued, although in connection with the later work, that such grounding is both impossible from and incompatible with Foucault's approach. See for example Frazer (1985) but mostly J. Habermas, 'Questions Concerning the Theory of Power', *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) in particular p. 88-96. I do not have the space here to enter this particular debate, which anyway is not directly relevant to this paper (as it bears on Foucault's conception of power). It should be noted, however, that the objections presented rest on two implicit (and questionable) premises: a) that such grounding should be universal and b) that since Foucault cannot (or refuses to) provide this sort of grounding, the only alternative for him is a nihilistic form of relativism. See for example: 'Genealogy (...) takes the side of those who resist established practices of power. From this position of counterpower, it gains a perspective that is supposed to go beyond the perspectives of the given possessors of power. From this perspective, *it is supposed to be able to transcend all validity claims that are only constituted in the enchanted circle of power*. (...) Foucault's concept of power does not permit such a concept of counterpower that grants cognitive privilege on the basis of a philosophy of history. (...) Those who conquer the theoretical avant garde of today (...) *cannot validate for their knowledge any superiority according to standards of truth claims that would transcend local agreements*.' (Habermas , 92-93, my italics). Habermas concludes that Foucault's only response is to 'profess his allegiance to an embattled perspectivism' (ibidem); but it is not clear that perspectivism is thus embattled: the absence of universal standards does not necessarily mean that all perspectives are equivalent, or that no normative judgment is possible. From Foucault's standpoint, it is more likely to imply that the robust conception of normativity presupposed by Habermas' objections needs to be revised.

Thus humanists could argue that Foucault did not practice what he preached, and that his discourse was no less normative than theirs; furthermore, even if they accepted his indictment of the analytic of finitude, they could still weasel out of the archaeologist's clutches by slipping through the gap between the assertoric and the apodictic. Yet there is a third set of difficulties. Foucault sought to bolster his attacks against humanism by pointing out that (regardless of whether it was intrinsically or only incidentally detrimental to thought) 'man' as a structure was on its way out anyway: if this was the case, then all movements grounded in this épistémè (including humanism) were bound to sink with the empirico-transcendental ship. Thus 'as soon as one realised that all human knowledge, all human existence (…) are trapped within structures, i.e. within a formal system of elements which obey formal relations that anyone can describe, man so to speak ceases to be his own subject. (…) One discovers that what makes man possible is at the end of the day a set of structures, structures that he may be able to describe but of which he is not the subject or the sovereign consciousness' (DE I: 601 sq [RC: 87 sq]).[43] Thus the rise of structuralism and the displacement of humanist concepts were seen as indications that the analytic of finitude is loosening its grip on modernity and that we are on the brink of an epistemic shift which will bring into being a new historical a priori, that of the 'return of language' (OT: 384; more generally see p. 383-386). However there are two problems with this argument. Firstly, it is somewhat circular: on the one hand the withdrawal of 'man' as an épistémè is used to predict the doom of humanist conceptions of man; on the other, the demise of such conceptions is seen as indicative of the imminent death of 'man'. What counts as a premise in the first part of the reasoning becomes a conclusion in the second, and vice versa. Secondly, if one takes seriously the

[43] See also: 'what traverses us profoundly, what is before us, is the *system*, (...) a set of relations which maintain and transform themselves independently from the things they connect. (...) Lacan's importance comes from the fact that he showed how, through the patient's discourses and the symptoms of his neurosis, structures, the very system of language — and not the subject — are what speaks. (...) The 'I' exploded (see modern literature) — it is the discovery of the 'there is' [il y a]. There is a 'one' ['on'] (...). Instead of putting man in the place of God [an allusion to Derrida's criticism of Sartre in the *Ends of Man*], an anonymous thought, knowledge without a subject (DE I: 514). See also : 'this notorious man, this human nature or this human essence or these specific features of man [ce propre de l'homme], were never found. When the phenomena of madness or neurosis were analysed, what was found is an unconscious (...) which had nothing to do with what could be expected of human essence (...), an unconscious which (...) functioned as a language. And as a result man was evaporating precisely insofar as he was stalked in his own depths [traqué dans ses profondeurs]' (DE I: 663-664 [FL: 52]). On the godlike place attributed by humanism to man, see also: 'yet the man-subject, man as the subject of his own consciousness or freedom, is, at the end of the day, a kind of correlative image of God. 19th century man is God incarnated in humanity. (...) And Nietzsche is the one who, by denouncing the death of God, denounced at the same time this God-like man the 19th century had not ceased to dream about' (DE I: 664 [FL: 53]). On the anonymity of thought and of language, see Foucault's study of Blanchot in *The Thought of the Outside* and his work on *Raymond Roussel,* French & European Publications: 1992.

characterisation of 'man' as the historical a priori which has formed the condition of possibility of knowledge since the end of the 18th century, then the logic which consists in using empirical observations to infer its disappearance is somewhat dubious: by definition transcendental conditions are immune to empirical refutation. Of course, one could answer this objection by pointing out that 'man' (like all épistémès) is not a purely transcendental structure but a *historical a priori*: by virtue of its historical dimension it is susceptible to being affected by empirical changes. Yet such a reply would come at a significant theoretical cost, namely the replication, at a meta-level, of the slippage between the empirical and the transcendental characteristic of the analytic of finitude itself: the only way in which empirical changes could affect the epistemic determination provided by 'man' as a historical a priori would be if such determination turned out, at the end of the day, to be causally determined by empirical processes. These would thus have exactly the same 'quasi-transcendental' function as that which Foucault attributes to the empirical contents which 'release their conditions of possibility' in the analytic of finitude. In this case, the humanist could retort that even on Foucault's own terms, his pessimistic pronouncements about the disappearance of 'man' (and subsequent indictments of the humanist notions that are supposed to depend on this épistémè) ends up formally replicating the very structure of what it criticises, and thus could be seen as a further development (rather than a way out) of the analytic of finitude[44]: 'man' may have a greater life expectancy than anticipated.

So what are we to make of the whole debate? It seems clear from the analyses above that neither his opponents nor Foucault himself had any decisive arguments to offer for or against humanism. The failure of the first rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of archaeology as a method, and of Foucault's correlative characterisation of 'man' as the empirico-transcendental double and of the analytic of finitude as our most recent epistemic ground. The objections presented to him failed to hit their mark because they took his statements about the 'death of man' at face value and read into them various conceptions of man (as a person or a free consciousness) which for the archaeologist were merely derivative of the appearance of 'man' as the empirico-transcendental double: to use a metaphor dear to Foucault, the humanist objections pertained to the 'surface' of history, whereas the archaeologist was concerned with its depths. Yet conversely Foucault's attacks on humanism did not fare much better, although for different reasons: while he presented a very interesting reconstruction of how the ambiguity of 'man' as a double made it

[44] See B. Han (2001), in particular part I, chapter 2.

possible for the Copernican turn to evolve into the analytic of finitude, a process which resulted in the anthropological sleep, he did not provide any explicit account of how the various humanist conceptions of man are related to 'man'. The consequence is that while the reader may end up convinced that the anthropological turn was indeed nefarious for various branches of philosophy, the humanist can still argue that so long as this charting of the depths of history by the archaeologist is not explicitly connected to surface developments, its conclusions are no objection to humanist conceptions of man. Furthermore, the modality of Foucault's criticism of humanism oscillates between the apodictic and the assertoric, the normative and the descriptive: as we saw, he formulates no grounds (universal or otherwise) for such normativity, and the description as it stands does not suffice. At best, his indictment of humanism remains promissory.

Can we learn anything from this double impasse? Hopefully, yes. For one thing, it provides an a contrario insight into the nature of real philosophical exchange. As we saw, the debate about the death of man was not a genuine dialogue but rather a case of philosophers talking (voluntarily or not) at cross purposes. To a large extent, the reason for this is that they mostly relied on the ambiguity of the term 'man' rather than to try to clarify their own use of the concept in relation to other possible uses (and in particular their opponents'). In reality, the so-called debate was an exercise in solipsism. This can certainly be seen as a failure of communication and a striking illustration of what philosophical exchanges should *not* be — somewhat unsurprisingly, the controversy died down without having being resolved. However, on a more positive note the debate brought to light two important issues which were influential on Foucault's philosophical development and resurfaced in his later remarks about humanism. Importantly, they did so in ways which transformed the terms of the early debate by allowing for the possibility of a rapprochement, albeit not so much in terms of the conceptual contents involved as with respect to the values upheld.[45] Thus the later Foucault's work on subjectivity and freedom, even though it is still explicitly cast in opposition to humanism, may be seen as an implicit attempt to retain what Habermas would call the latter's 'emancipatory force' while forging a non metaphysical content

[45] Some interpreters see Foucault as a nihilist who does not uphold any values at all and ends up in an incoherent position (see C. Taylor: 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth', in Hoy (ed), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, 1986). Although I do not have the space to enter this debate, it seems clear to me from the quotes below and more generally from Foucault's later emphasis on freedom that he does, although what he means by the latter differs from the autonomy central both to the post-Kantian tradition and its reworking by the Frankfurt school (as dialogic rather than monologic). For a defence of this, see J. Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy,* N.Y.: Columbia UP, 1988

for its central concepts.[46] Let me explain: as it is well known, at the end of the seventies Foucault decided to refocus his genealogical studies on the project of a 'history of subjectivity' ('Michel Foucault', DE IV: 634 [AME: 461]). Such a history focused on the dynamic tensions between problematisations of the self, relations of power and forms of knowledge. It involved a redefinition of the subject, not as a 'substance' but as a 'form which is neither mostly nor always identical to itself' (DE IV: 718 [EST: 290]). Such a definition was openly designed to avoid the foundationalist and essentialist aspects of humanism denounced in Foucault's early work: 'one must also skirt the philosophical approach which consists in going up, towards a constituting subject which must account for what any object of knowledge in general can be; on the contrary, one must go downwards, towards the study of the concrete practices whereby the subject is constituted in the immanence of a domain of knowledge' (DE IV: 634 [AME: 462]).[47] Consequently the later work developed in a different, more genealogical direction and proposed a historical critique focused on the mutual variability of subject/object relations, itself referred to changes in social practices[48]: 'my aim', Foucault now tells us, 'will be to show you how social practices can come to generate domains of knowledge which make not only new objects, new concepts, new techniques appear, but also totally new forms of subjects and of subjects of knowledge' (DE II: 539 [P: 2]). Thus in 'La vérité et les formes juridiques' (DE II: 630 sq) Foucault looks at the transformations brought within the judicial domain by the simultaneous appearance of a new form of objectivity and a new type of subjectivity: the former lies in the idea that proofs can be established by gathering facts which will serve for the evaluation of the truth claims put forward by the parties in dispute (as

[46] One may object here that Foucault was distrustful of the idea of 'liberation': 'I have always been a little wary about the general theme of liberation insofar as (...) it risks referring to the idea that there is a human nature or ground which found itself, due to certain historical, economic and social processes, masked, alienated or imprisoned in repressive mechanisms' (DE IV: 709-710 [EST: 282]). However note that this distrust was not inspired by the desire to reject the concept of freedom as an ideal but by the worry that liberation may come to be seen as its sole content (which would be the correlate of seeing power as solely repressive): 'It is well known that this practice of liberation is not enough to define practices of freedom which will then be necessary so that this people, this society or these individuals can define acceptable (...) forms for their existence or political society. This is why I insist on practices of freedom rather than on processes of liberation which, once again, have their place but cannot, on their own, define all the practical forms of freedom' (ibidem [ibidem: 282-3]).

[47] See also: 'one must also inverse the philosophical approach which consists in going up towards a constituting subject which is asked for an account of what any object of knowledge in general can be; on the contrary, one must go down, towards the study of concrete practices through which the subject is constituted in the immanence of a domain of knowledge. (...) This refusal [of appealing to a constituting subject] has for its aim to uncover the processes specific to an experience in which subject and object transform each other and through each other' (DE IV: 634 [AME: 462]).

[48] 'It is 'practices', understood as modes of acting and thinking at the same time, which provide the key to the intelligibility of the correlative constitution of the subject and the object' (DE IV: 635 [AME: 463]).

opposed to such proofs being dependent on the word and social status of individuals vouching for either party). Correlatively, the new type of subjectivity resides in the idea of a detached, neutral observer occupying an 'ideal point' (631). In both cases, the new social practice that proved historically determining is the inquiry [enquête].

However the adoption of this new focal point and method signals an important change vis-à-vis the earlier position: like the humanists (and unlike his younger self), the later Foucault now acknowledges the importance of the notion of subjectivity to understand human practices. At the same time, starting from these practices and emphasising the reciprocity and historical plasticity of subject/object relations allows him to develop a theory of the subject which transforms the notion and avoids the pitfalls denounced in the early work: it does not treat such a subject as an invariant starting point, nor as the ground of knowledge. [49] As a consequence, the dangers of the empirico-transcendental replication specific to the analytic of finitude are much less likely to arise. Thus by giving up on the essentialism and the foundational ambitions inherited from the Copernican turn, Foucault flushes out the anthropological bath water but retains the proverbial baby. In this sense, the notorious 'return of the subject' does not contradict his early attacks against the dominance of the subject on the post-war philosophical scene. On the contrary, it puts forward a promising alternative to think of subjects in a non metaphysical, non essentialist way; moreover, by doing so it opens the possibility of identifying a new common ground between Foucault and humanists.

This is made apparent by his later reflections on the possibility and nature of free agency (which is so central to humanism): as we saw, at the time of the debate about the 'death of man' Foucault simply seemed to deny the existence of freedom, arguing that individuals are unconsciously determined by various structures (social or linguistic, for example) over which they have no control. Yet the theme acquires a much greater importance in the later work and becomes central to the definitions of both power and subjectivity: thus the crucial difference between power and violence is that the former can only act on free agents. It not only presupposes but requires the possibility of resistance. Correlatively, freedom is seen as an intrinsic property of human beings and is identified with our ability for self problematisation (effecting a 'permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy' (DE IV: 572 [EST: 313]). While this ability is constrained

[49] Thus Foucault denounces the 'very grave fault' which consists in 'presupposing, at the end of the day, that the human subject, the subject of knowledge, and the forms of knowledge themselves are in a way already and definitely pre-given, and that economic, social and political conditions of existence only deposit and imprint themselves in that definitely given subject' (DE II: 539 [P: 2]).

by specific historical conditions[50], it nevertheless involves the possibility of spontaneous action (in particular through the creative transformation of such practices).[51] Just like his later definition of subjectivity, Foucault's new understanding of freedom as a plastic, creative ability is meant to avoid essentialism (in the sense that it is purely formal and does not identify such ability with any of its historical forms). Foucault explicitly contrasts it with the more substantive conceptions of freedom underlying humanist positions: 'what frightens me, in humanism, is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model, valid for any type of freedom. I think that our future includes more secrets, more possible freedoms and inventions than humanism allows us to imagine' (DE IV: 782 [TS: 15]). Note, however, that the target of Foucault's criticism is not the (rather humanist) idea that freedom should be a central value to human development — the title of one of Foucault's last interventions ('The Care of the Self as A Practice of Freedom') attests to this —, but rather the limited and morally constraining conception allegedly put forward by humanists. The disagreement about the nature of freedom should not conceal a certain communality of ideals.

In this respect, it may be useful to point out — last but not least — that Foucault's emphasis on the centrality of freedom and plasticity of human self creation is not quite as original as it may seem. In fact, it was typical of the one kind of humanism that he never discussed, namely that of the Renaissance.[52] Following Blumenberg (1983) (and to a lesser extent Craig: 1987), Cooper (2002: 25 sq) reads the revival of the humanities from the 14th century onwards as a reaction against the crisis generated by Ockham's scepticism towards the Augustinian confidence in the power of human reason, which he replaced with a 'fascination for God's absolute and unconstrained power' (Cooper: 26). From this emerged, instead of the orderly Augustinian world of ideas, fully accessible to the powers of the human mind, the bleak picture of an opaque universe ruled by the iron will of an unintelligible God, in which man had no particular privilege or place.[53] The main reaction to this desolate vision was the Renaissance's emphasis on 'self assertion'

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[50] Thus 'the [practices of the self] are not something that the individual invents himself. They are schemas that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested, imposed by his culture, his society or his social group'. (DE IV: 718 [EST: 291]).

[51] 'The subject constitutes itself through practices of subjugation [assujettissement], or, in a more autonomous fashion, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity' (DE IV: 733 [FL 452]).

[52] In the whole corpus I could only find one very brief allusion to J. Burckhardt's interpretation of the Renaissance: 'during the Renaissance one also sees (...) that the hero is his own work of art. The idea that one may turn one's life into a work of art is an idea which is incontestably foreign to the Middle Ages and which appeared with the Renaissance'. (DE IV: 410 [EST: 278]).

[53] This picture is seen by Cooper as the inheritor of the first Gnostics, who thought that 'the true God is beyond the created universe and quite alien to it' (Cooper: 25). Similarly, for Ockham God is a 'hidden God',

(Blumenberg), which answered the challenge posed by the displacement of man as a knowing agent by refocusing on the human potential for creativity. In this shift from contemplation to agency, what came to be seen as characteristic of man are his creative abilities, deemed to mirror God's own and not to be bound by any particular nature or limits.[54] This is particularly visible in Pico Della Mirandola's reworking of the myth of Epimetheus in his *Oratio*, in which God addresses man as follows: 'we have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own, the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgment, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou will fix the limits of nature for thyself.[55] I have placed thee at the centre of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have We made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honourable, art the molder and maker of thyself' (Pico Della Mirandola, 4-5). While there are limits to the rapprochement[56], this address strikes incredibly close chords to Foucault's own rejection of essentialism ('we have given thee… no form of thy own') and emphasis on self creation (using an aesthetic paradigm echoed by Foucault's analyses of dandysm, Pico concludes

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a being of arbitrary and infinite power, unbound by good or evil. By contrast, Cooper refers to the modern age as the 'second overcoming of gnosticism' (Cooper: 25).

[54] According to both Blumenberg and Cooper, this was accompanied with a new interest in the prime instruments of human creativity, namely language, work and the body. The rising interest in the natural world was also the correlate of this focus on human agents that move and travel in such a world. For more details, see Cooper: 45.

[55] Compare with: 'for me, what must be produced is not man as nature would have designed him, or as his essence would prescribe; we must produce something which does not exist yet and of which we cannot know what it will be.' (DE IV: 74 [P: 275]).

[56] The passage quoted ends in the following way: 'Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Though canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine'. The subsequent pages make it clear that it is much more desirable for man to grow upward, towards the 'first places' beyond the 'chamber of the world', than to identify with the lower natures, and gives indications as to how this might be achieved: 'let a certain holy ambition invade the mind, so that we may not be content with mean things but may aspire to the highest things and strive with all our forces to attain them: for if we will to, we can. Let us spurn earthly things: let us struggle towards the heavens. (...) Let us see what they [the seraphim, cherubim and thrones] are doing, what life they are living. If we too live that life — for we can — we shall equal their lot. The seraph burn with the fire of charity; they cherub shines with the radiance of intelligence; the throne stands in steadfastness of judgment. (...) Therefore, by rivalling the life of a cherub on the earth, by confining the onslaught of the affections by means of moral science, and by shaking off the mist of reason by means of dialectic, as if washing off the filth of ignorance and vice, let us purge the soul'. (*Oratio,* p. 7-9). Thus Pico's emphasis on the plasticity of man is underwritten by a strongly normative conception of how this potential should evolve. Foucault would most certainly have

that 'thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer'). Such closeness reinforces the suggestion that there may be much more of a common ground than is usually thought — and this time not just in terms of the values upheld but also of conceptual content — between Foucault's mature views and at least some forms of humanism.

objected to such a view, if only on account of its religious underpinnings (see for example 'Structuralisme et post-structuralisme', DE IV: 438-441 [AME: 440-442]).

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