

The Nearing Demise of Modern Subject/Man

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Abstract

The Scope of this article is to show that the modern Subject, which is being considered to be an active agent, in reality is reaching its demise. Furthermore, this article will explicate the nature of the modern subjectivity/man, particularly its ability to construct knowledge, as its exegesis being done by modern thinkers and in due course of showing that this subjectivity/man is near its demise. This article will try to explicate a critique of modern subjectivity/man through the spectacles of Michel Foucault.

In this article the focus will remain on Kant for the exegesis of modern subjectivity/man as he is the most profound propagator of modern subject. In the second stage it will focus on Foucault's Archaeological analysis since he has developed an argument that the demise of modern subject is near and inevitable.

Key words: Kant Model of Knowledge, Copernican Revolution, Michel Foucault Epistemology, Grid of Specification.

Modern Subjectivity/Man

From the onset of the modernity, specifically Enlightenment, the claim of it was to provide freedom to the subject who is enslaved in the shackles of Religion, multiple authorities and classical thought etc. Peter Gay puts it like this, "the men of enlightenment united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitan, and freedom, above all freedom in its many forms" (Gay, 1995,p.3)

Similarly Kant, the most influential of all modern thinkers, put forth that enlightenment

is a process of freeing mankind from the shackles of authorities as he says "Enlightenment means emergence from self imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use own understanding without the guidance of others" (Kant, 1996)

Although there could be several interpretations of self imposed immaturity but the one which the article at hand considers over here is epistemological. We all are aware of Kant's Copernican Revolution. By this Copernican Revolution Kant, provided modern subjectivity/

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man, the active subject, central position in the process of constructing knowledge.

Kant, instead of considering man a passive subject, as Hume did, who only receives information from objects rather made man an active agent, a constructive and central subject in the process of formation of the knowledge.

Therefore, in this sense Kant liberated mankind from the self imposed immaturity of not being an active agent capable of constructing the edifice of knowledge. Therefore, to Kant man becomes central epistemologically and hence it is considered as Epistemological Anthropocentricity.

Kant's Model of Knowledge

This section will briefly expound the model of knowledge Kant discovered. It will also elaborate the role of Man, as Kant considered, in the formation of knowledge and limits of this modern subject as well.

For Kant, all knowledge starts from our sensations/representations of object. But these representations which one receives are possible only due to subjectivity a priori conditions i.e. Space and Time. For Kant, space and time are subjective a priori conditions for the possibility of representations of objects. Although Kant's exegesis of Space and Time is different from that of Newton's and Leibniz's. It was first time in the history of Mankind that Space and Time were argued as something subjective a priori conditions rather being considered as absolute or relational.

As stated that it was for the first time that Space and Time became subjective conditions. As per Kant, "We should, indeed, know it completely but always under the subjective conditions of Space and Time – Conditions which are originally inherent in Subject" (Kant, 1929. p. 83)

These Subjective conditions don't have any value apart from Human Subject, "It is, therefore, solely from the human stand point that we can speak of space, of extended things, etc" (Kant, 1929) These are just conditions of possibility of experience. That's why Kant called these subjective a priori conditions of experience as Transcendental.

For Kant, the process of knowledge starts when a subject gets representations from the external world under the subjective spectacles of space and time. But this process only completes when subject being an active agent do synthesis of the raw material i.e. representations received. The function of synthesis is being done by faculty of understanding. In addition Kant argued that both representations and thought have distinct functions and one can't negate the importance of any one of them. As Kant puts it "These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their positions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the sense can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arises" (Kant, 1929. p. 93) Kant claims that he has discovered the structure of human thought/understanding. This structure consist of 12 categories (Kant, 1929) and he further claims that this structure of thought is universal and absolute.

Now here it's important to highlight the role of Kantian Subject. Kant claims that he has brought the Copernican Revolution in the field of knowledge. In this whole process of formation of knowledge the priority of subject is very evident. "That all representations/combinations is the only one which cannot be given through the object. Being an act of self activity of subject, it cannot be executed save by the subject itself" (Kant, 1929. p. 152)

This Kantian subject is not a product or a result of the process of synthesis rather it is one which is prior to the very process of synthesis through which knowledge is formulated. In other words, this active agent is being presupposed by the process of formation of knowledge. This subject became Transcendental i.e. condition for the possibility of knowledge at Kant and this is his Copernican Revolution. This is his epistemic Enlightenment and liberation of mankind from the self imposed immaturity of not being an active agent capable of constructing the edifice of knowledge.

Since Kantian subject can't know the things as they are but only can know as they appear to the subject, this is due to the subjective spectacles of Space and Time. Subject due to these spectacles cannot know things as they are i.e.

Noumena, only can know things as they appear to subject. Although things as they exist; but they are not knowable to the subject because they don't agree with the subjective preconditions of experience and therefore, remain a sort of skepticism regarding the knowledge of things as they are. This further means though subject may not be able to know things as they are but then the subject has all capability of constructing knowledge of the world as it appears to the him i.e. Man! Subject/Man has the capacity to build the whole edifice of Knowledge.

It's evident from the above stated points that Kant's subject is not just prior to the process of formation of Knowledge but also a precondition for the possibility of knowledge i.e. subject is a priori condition for the possibility of Knowledge. Subjectivity/Man is all prior to the process of formation of knowledge and has acquired a central position in the process of formation of knowledge. This subjectivity not only constitutes knowledge of phenomenal (things as they appears) world but also gives meaning to it. When one receives manifolds of representations from the world at that time these are noting but meaningless bundles, it's the Subject/Modern Subjectivity/Man that synthesis those bundles and produce knowledge from them.

¹ Kantian model of knowledge is different from Traditional conception of knowledge. For Plato as well there was a distinction between real and apparent World. For him there was a distinction between world of things and world of ideas. Plato considered world of things to be illusionary, deceptive and merely a copy of the real world i.e. World of Ideas. For Plato as well this World of Ideas i.e. Real World was not experiential through one's sense but he didn't claim that the knowledge of Real World/World of Ideas is not possible. For him knowledge of reality is possible not through the lower seats of Sense rather through the seat of Rationality. Therefore, knowledge of reality was possible.

Similarly this trend was also very prominent at the beginning of Modern Philosophy. Descartes was in the search of clear, distinct and indubitable knowledge of reality. In this pursuit through the methodical doubt he found clear, distinct and indubitable foundations of real knowledge i.e. "I". Therefore, at Descartes as well knowledge of reality was possible. This trend was evident throughout history of Western Philosophy.

But at Kant things have gone the opposite way. Kant broke this trend of the Western Philosophy by claiming though knowledge is possible but not of reality. This was a clear shift in Western Philosophy and it's due to Kant's Transcendental Philosophy.

Before Kant, it was thought that all knowledge i.e. concepts created by Thought or faculty of understanding must conform with the object of knowledge. In other words spectator should revolve around the object of knowledge. But he considers that it would be better if we assume that all objects must conform to our Knowledge i.e. Thought of Man. Kant just inverted the relation between spectator and the object. Therefore, knowledge depends upon this spectator, this modern subjectivity/Man and this is Kant's Epistemological Anthropocentricity.

Foucault's Criticism of Kantian Subjectivity/Man

In this section the article will try to excavate the Foucaultian criticism of Kantian Subjectivity/Man on two planes. Firstly it will show that the subject don't have that epistemological anthropocentric status as it appears at Kant. Secondly it will then try to show that this modern subjectivity/Man will have an end as it had a beginning. The article's whole focus will remain in the Archaeological investigations of Michel Foucault.

In the previous section we have briefly sketched the Kantian subject and its role in the formation of knowledge. But there appears certain questions that needs to be addressed. Some of these questions are: Is subject really having freedom and capable to constitute the edifice of knowledge? Has subject acquired anthropocentric status? Is this subject really a per-condition for the possibility of knowledge? Has this Kantian subject transcends the history and attains a-historical, a-cultural status? Does

this subject give order to things? And if not then what is that which gives order to things and govern them? The article will certainly try to provide answers to these questions from the Foucaultian perspective

It was a passage from Chinese encyclopedia of animals that enforced Foucault to write his famous work "The Order of Things". As Foucault himself stated that, "This book first arose with a passage from Borges, out of the laughter that shattered" (Foucault, 2002. p. xvi) It was the complexity, difficulty and mere impossibility to understand the Chinese Classification of animals which Foucault accepts as well. This led him to inquire and write the whole book. Why Foucault was unable to understand that taxonomy of animals since he and the Chinese writer of the encyclopedia share the same structure of thought and share same conception of subject! This is because the Chinese encyclopedia has a different system of thought working employed at its basis than that of Modern thought. It was the difference of systems of thought that makes Foucault laugh at that taxonomy and led him to confess his inability to understand that taxonomy of animals. As per Foucault, "In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of own, the stark impossibility of thinking that" (Foucault, 2002, p. xvi) This led Foucault to start thinking that there are different systems of thoughts and the meaning/ordering of things depends upon the systems of thoughts. Once the system of thought changes with it the whole ordering/meaning of things changes as well.

It has been mentioned that the focus of the article will be on Foucault's Archaeological Inquiry, but what is Archaeology?

"Foucault's archaeology goes beneath the conscious level to reveal the epistemic 'unconscious' that defines and make possible individual knowledge" (Gutting, 2001, p268) Foucault in the foreword of "The Order of Things" expressed his aim of this archaeological inquiry that he wanted to uncover the Positive Unconscious of the Knowledge. By Positive Unconsciousness he means those epistemological principles that work beneath the whole sphere of knowledge of any particular era. Although these epistemic principles are part of any scientific inquiry but such part that escapes the consciousness of the scientist himself. As he elaborated: "What I would like to do, however, is to reveal a positive unconsciousness of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse" (Foucault, 2002, p. xi)

It means that through Archaeological inquiry Foucault wanted to reveal those intellectual structures that lie beneath as fundamentals which produces/control and order the entire field of knowledge of any particular epoch. Yet those fundamentals are so much obvious that the scientist of that particular epoch remains unconscious of them.

Those fundamentals that work beneath the surface of discourses and yet control them are known as Episteme or epistemic principles. Episteme are those epistemological principles that are employed beneath the whole sphere of knowledge of any particular era. All the dis-

courses of any particular era or epoch employ same epistemic principles.

Another imperative regarding this epistemic field is that this gives order/meaning to discourses and these discourses gives order/meaning to other things including man. It's Episteme that classify them, relates them with one another and construct a meaningful relation between them, in short govern them.

Foucault's claim can be verified if one analyzes the current discourses of knowledge like Sociology, Psychology, Economics or Medicine etc, or any other positive science; One would find that what these discourses do is that they tell us the meaning of life and of world, what is knowledge and what is not, what one can say what's not or what is fact and what is superstition.

Now the question that whether these episteme's are absolute, universal and a-historical? Foucault argues that Episteme, basic epistemological principle of an epoch which render meaning, aims, purposes, does not remain same. There appear ruptures and discontinuities among them. Whenever there appears a new order of things, or a certain way of analyses of things or some unique discourse appears, than it's a sign that there occurs some rupture at the epistemic level. Foucault's major concern in his archaeological inquiry remains to point out those ruptures and discontinuities that occurred at the level of episteme.

According to Foucault, sphere of knowledge of any particular epoch is not something static. For him it's not the case that once a particular

structure of knowledge is been discovered than that structure will remain unchanged and absolute. There appear ruptures and discontinuities among those structure and spheres of knowledge. Whenever such ruptures appear than it means that there appears discontinuity at the level of Episteme. Therefore, neither episteme are absolute nor they are universal or a-historical rather episteme are historical and particular.

Before moving further let's see the difference between Foucaultian and Kantian conditions for the possibility of Knowledge. In Kantian perspective, its categorizes the thought of subject due to which knowledge is possible. For Kant knowledge appears when a subject synthesize a bundle of representations. This synthesis is being done by subjective a-priori categories of thought. If these categories are not present than there appears no synthesis, judgment and further there will be no knowledge. This is the a priority of Kantian categories of thought.

Secondly, these categories are pure as well i.e. these are not the result of some representations or judgments rather they have their seat in the Understanding/thought. "Pure concepts can, therefore, be characterized as concepts that have their origin (seat) in the nature of human understanding" (Allison, 2004,p. 116) In this way Kant claims that he has discovered the structure of thought. This structure of thought will remain same and a-historical. In this way Kantian categorizes are a-priori and a-historical and these are conditions for the possibility of knowledge.

For Foucault conditions for the possibility of knowledge are not subjective. He claims

that condition of the possibility of knowledge is Episteme. These episteme's are neither pure nor a-historical rather for Foucault episteme's are "Historical a-priori"

Foucault substantiate his claim by taking three disciplines i.e. study of living creatures, study of exchange and study of language. Then by archaeological inquiry he found that all these disciplines follow same epistemic principle within a particular era. For the last 300 hundred years of European history of these three disciplines he identified two discontinuities and ruptures. He identifies three different Archaeological setup erupted from 16th century to 19th century as Renaissance, Classical Age and Modern Age. Every archaeological setup has its own peculiar episteme. These ruptures occurred at the level of Episteme. Therefore, Episteme are historical as they have a beginning and an end as well and all these episteme and discourses are developed in some time so they are neither absolute nor they are universal as most modernist consider.

Although epistemes are historical but they are a-priori as well. Episteme of a particular archaeological system remains a-priori within it. It is prior to subject and to disciplines as well. As it is prior within a system therefore it not only constitutes discipline but also carve subject as well.

Now to the question that whether the subject/Man has that epistemological anthropocentric status as Kant claims?

In Foucaultian terms that certainly is not the case. Modern subjectivity/Man doesn't have

that status since it's not the subject who constitutes the knowledge. Nor the subject has those categories which are conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Its episteme that not only constitute the sphere of knowledge and disciplines but also constitute the modern subjectivity/man as well. Man is not sovereign being, in epistemological sense, as propounded by the Kant rather man is an enslaved being constituted by the modern episteme. For Foucault: "In one sense, man is governed by labor, life and language. His concrete existence finds determinations in them" (Foucault, 2002, p. 341)

For Foucault, Kantian Copernican revolution is nothing but illusion. There is no such thing as sovereign subject capable of constituting knowledge. The question is subject don't have such a role as Kant claims? Foucault showed that subject/man is constituted by different historical events and disciplines of knowledge. Man's whole being is determined and constituted by these discourses and disciplines.

If it's not the subject that constitutes the knowledge rather its epistemic principles that govern disciplines of knowledge than how these episteme's do this? What are those epistemic conditions of knowledge?

Foucault considers that any discipline appears due to three epistemic conditions. First of which is Surface of Emergence. By surface of emergence he means socio cultural conditions of the plain up on which a science is going to appears. Outside the surface of emergence no knowledge is possible. It means that for Foucault the priority of life and cultural world is a basic epistemic condition for the possibility of

knowledge.

The other epistemic condition of formation of knowledge is Authority of Delimitation. These authorities are within cultural world. These authorities during the formation of discourse and discipline of knowledge play a vital role by forming the object of knowledge. The medical institute and medical discipline or biology, consider each living being an organic object i.e. one which has several organs which works like a system. On the basis of these functions of organs biology gives order to living beings.

Before biology, Natural History classifies living beings on the basis of representational aspect of living beings like bodily appearance etc. But in biology order is done on the basis of internal organism and their functions which are not visible through naked eye like respiratory system or digestive systems etc. This object of study i.e. organic body was not present in natural history

The third is Grid of Specifications. It further expands the initial discourse. This is a system by which further branches of a discourse appears. Biology was than subdivided into botany and zoology etc. These two divisions were further divided into many subparts. This specification is done by grid of specification. In this manner the structure of knowledge develops and discourses flourish.

But still if one thinks that man has central position, epistemological anthropocentricity, and that man has such a designation that all other things revolves around him and that its man who is doing marvels in different field than for Foucault "this imperious designation is am-

biguous” (Foucault, 2002, p. 341) In reality man is “Enslaved Sovereign” (Foucault, 2002) Man and his concert existence is being governed by discourses like economics, medicine from psychology, language, sociology etc and apart these discourses no determination of his concrete existence is possible. As Sheridan defines this concept of man as “The modern notion of a creature who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of biology, philology, and economics” (Sheridan, 1980, p. 77)

Foucault argues that apparently it seems that man has a very central position since it is man who dissected animals and discovered biological and ecological systems. It is man who speaks and forms principles of philology and it is man who in response to his wants discovered the principles of economics. This implies that man as conceived by modernist is natural and a-historical

Furthermore, it seems illogical and meaningless to speak of the beginning or the near demise of modern subject. For Foucault to give such central designation to Man is ambiguous. He identifies birth of Man as “when natural history becomes biology, when analysis of wealth becomes economics and above all, reflection upon language becomes philology, and classical discourse eclipsed, then in the profound upheaval of such archaeological mutation, man appears in his ambiguous position as object of knowledge and as subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator” (Foucault, 2002, p. 340)

According to him, one is unable to observe not only the birth of Modern subject/Man but

also its upcoming demise as well and this all is because of our short sidedness and lack of Memory. As per Foucault: “To imagine, for an instant, what the world and thought and the truth might be if man did not exist, is considered to be merely indulging in paradox. This is because we are so blinded by the recent manifestation of man that we can no longer remember a time – and it is not so long ago – when the world, its order, and human beings existed, but man did not” (Foucault, 2002, p. 351)

Certainly it’s lack of memory that leads one to consider that the modern subject/man is a natural and a-historical being that has a long existence. We are so much accustomed to this conception of Man; this is such an apparent that one fails to see the historicity of it. Modern subject is so much obvious that one seems to be unable to apprehend its origin and similarly unable to conceive the world and life without modern subject.

If one study disciplines through archaeological methodology than it would become evident that the man is a recent invention, man is a product of different disciplines and discourses, that man is the outcome of a certain historicity. That’s why Foucault says that “before the end of the 18th century, man did not exist. He is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with its own hands less than two hundred years ago” (Foucault, 2002, p. 336) and Sheridan puts this like “Modern man—the man that stands at the centre of the three sciences to emerge from the collapse of representation” (Sheridan, 1980, p. 77) and by representation Sheridan means Classical Age.

Man as Foucault highlighted is a product of modern episteme in general and Economics, philology and Biology in particular. Although there were humans in all episteme and in all archaeological systems but there was no sign of man as conceived by Modern Thinkers in general and Kant in particular.

One can find the concept of mind/body in classical thought, one can find humanism in the renaissance but one cannot find any sign of man as conceived by modern thinkers in any other episteme. As per Foucault: "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" (Foucault, 2002, p. 347)

Conclusion

As stated earlier that the aim of this paper is to analyze the Foucaultian criticism of Kantian conception of knowledge. Secondly, to show that the modern subject considered as active agent due to its ability of constructing knowledge is an ambiguous position and finally developing an understanding that modern man is not natural, a-historical rather its historical.

For the above mentioned purpose one has observed the Kantian process of formation of knowledge. In it one found that knowledge starts with experience i.e. representations which one gets from external world but alone these manifolds of representations which are attained under subjective conditions of space and time are meaningless.

Furthermore, these manifolds of represen-

tations are synthesized through Faculty of Understanding/Thought which Kant claimed to be universal and absolute. Through process of synthesis knowledge is being produced but if the subject, i.e. man, is not there then this process of synthesis won't be possible. For Kant this is the function of subject/man through which knowledge appears. Modern subject/man is able to perform such function only because of the Copernican revolution. Kant Copernican revolution makes man central in the process of formulation of knowledge and also gives order/meaning to the world.

On the other hand Foucault showed that Kantian understanding of subject was wrong. As per Foucault this formation of Knowledge is done by certain other elements. These are surface of Emergence, Authorities of Delimitations and Grid of Specification being governed by some particular Episteme of any particular epoch. These episteme are historical not universal or natural, there appears ruptures and discontinuities in it once there appears any change at Archaeological Level.

In process of formulation of knowledge through the above mentioned Foucaultian Conditions of Knowledge not only object of Knowledge is formed but also subject. In modern era man appears as object of knowledge and subject of knowledge. Man, on one hand, is constituted by the modern episteme through discourses/disciplines. On the other hand, man is also object of study as well. It's the study of man, as an object, through which different positive discourses appeared, like when one started studying madness than psychopathology as discourse appeared and started determining

man's behavior. When man's relation in market and labor become object of study that discourses like economics and development studies appeared and started determining man's economic life etc. That why Foucault believed that Man is enslaved.

As Foucault has identified that there appears ruptures and discontinuities on the Archaeological level and he showed how Renaissance as eclipsed and Classical age took its place and at the end of 18th century a discontinuity again occurred which resulted in the emergence of Modern age and with it there occurred an invention i.e. the birth of Man. The logical outcome of Foucault's thesis would be that this modern episteme and Modern Man both would disappear. If there appeared any rupture at Modern Archaeology than that would result in the disappearance of Modern Subject/Man. Therefore to consider this Modern Man as Natural and a-historical is absolutely ambiguous and Foucault's answer to it would be nothing but a Philosophical Laugh (Foucault, 2002).

Finally, Kant in his article "What is Enlight-

enment", which Foucault considered to be connected with his three Critiques, considered that enlightenment means a critical attitude through which one should broke the shackles of immaturity. For him immaturity is to accept someone else authority while reason could guide oneself in that particular matter. He further goes on and defines enlightenment as an ongoing process.

Foucault criticizes Kantian approach to enlightenment. He considered that Kantian enlightenment is self contradictory i.e. on one hand Kant claims enlightenment to be an ongoing process but then made his conception of man as universal and a-historical. According to Foucault enlightenment consist in an ongoing continuous critical attitude, "as a permanent critique of our historical era" (Foucault, 1984, p. 32). Kant claims for critical attitude but goes against the very spirit of it. For Foucault enlightenment is ongoing critical processes through which one can find out those events of rupture that occur at the level of Episteme.

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