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As many critics have observed, in Pynchon, Modernity is depicted under the sign of Max Weber in the form of an oppressive rationalisation which banishes and dominates all that would stand in its way: “[t]he death of magic” as Jeff Baker puts it. Whether such a totalising appraisal of Weber is justified remains under debate, yet the insertion of this thought into the very core of America's political system is no better expressed than in *Gravity's Rainbow's* “MOM SLOTHROP'S LETTER TO AMBASSADOR KENNEDY”. This letter, which depicts Slothrop's mother writing to Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr. about her feelings of affinity for his parental unease during JFK's Patrol Torpedo boat incident in 1943, her anxiety about the state of America and her sexual relations with the future president, seems to echo with the guilt-ridden style of Samuel Beckett's *Eh Joe?* This comparative effect is achieved not only through the structural motion from an optimistic inquiry, “Well *hi* Joe how've ya *been*”, parallel to Beckett's “You're all right now, eh?”, before becoming “gloomy all so sudden”, but also by the frequent comma delimited first name appellation to the ambassador: “It's every parent's dream, Joe, that it is [...] It isn't starting to break down, is it, Joe? [...] You know, don't you? Golden clouds? Sometimes I think - ah, Joe, I think they're pieces of the heavenly city falling down”. While Beckett's piece focuses upon an old man listening to an ex-lover holding him to account for a young girl's suicide, Pynchon's microcosmic imitation uses the guilt-tripping voice of a “wicked old babe” to demonstrate that the love-'em and leave-'em approach of big business leads to a “terrible fear” and a rightly-felt difficulty believing “in a Plan with a shape bigger than I can see”; it is an approach which Pynchon depicts as having “laid”, in Beckett's terms, the general populous with its promise to use the “WLB” (War Labor Board) to keep the war effort on track and suppress “strike votes”, while insidiously profiting from the continuation of the war. Furthermore, it is a project of Weberian disenchantment; “Golden clouds” and the “heavenly city” resonate not only with the example of “the golden mountain” which Deleuze deploys to demonstrate Foucault's *statements*, but are of a thoroughly enchanted, metaphysical nature that is destroyed, or “broken down”, in the

Benjaminian battering of Klee's angel. Ultimately, the young girl of America, the spirit made light, will face her suicidal moment but, in the meantime, without seeing the whole plan, Nalline Slothrop can only have faith that Ambassador Kennedy is "in the groove" and take his word - "How true!" - that "we've got to modernize in Massachusetts, or it'll just keep getting worse and worse".

Alongside the relativism that is so crucial to Weber's, and Pynchon's, projects, this concept of slavish obedience, or trust in authority to think on our behalf - and especially when that authority insists that we modernize through technological positivism - is central to two essays bearing the same title - 'What is Enlightenment?' - the first written by Immanuel Kant, the second by Michel Foucault. In Kant's original piece on Enlightenment, he describes unenlightened humanity as being in a state of immaturity, enslaved to our self-incurred tutelage. For Foucault, Kant represents the "threshold of modernity", the moment when representation began to criticize Ideology and to structure its bounds according to the preconditions of perception. Foucault's response to Kant's essay is, however, unsure of whether the ultimate maturity that Kant proposes can ever be attained.

This paper is a subset of the most recent chapter I have written for my DPhil thesis which undertakes a revision of the existing critical scepticism towards Foucault in Pynchon scholarship in response to Hanjo Berressem's call for an appraisal of specificities of Enlightenment. Today, I do not, sadly, have time to give an overview of the entire survey I have conducted of Foucault's work on Enlightenment and the parallel readings of di- and con-vergence that I have undertaken. I will, therefore, limit myself to a discussion of the third element upon which this interaction has turned; an axis of ipseic ethics; the relation one has to oneself.

The second of Foucault's pieces under the title "What is Enlightenment" complements the first, providing the promised close reading of Kant's article which, although acknowledged as a "minor text", is still not quite on par with Nietzsche's

laundry list in the lowbrow stakes. By way of broad synopsis, Foucault's article is structured into two sections and a brief conclusion. The first of these sections is very much a restatement of the notion of philosophy found in the preceding text; Kant as the threshold of modernity wherein all post-Kantian philosophical thought possesses a degree of historicity and reflexivity upon the present. The second portion of Foucault's essay is, admittedly, still derived from the lecture, but is substantially more interesting for both its extension and refinement of terms.

In this second section, Foucault seeks to define “modernity as an attitude rather than as a period of history”, which is then clarified as a way “of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task”. It is, in short, “a bit like what the Greeks called an *ēthos*”. Foucault then, incongruously, extends this period of modernity under Kant into the notions of modernity as he sees them relayed by Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life*. Under this schema, Foucault sees an ironic heroization of the present, in which the present moment is made sacred so that, in its elevation, it becomes possible to imagine it otherwise. This reimagination of the present moves from *ēthos* to ethic when the modern subject, in this mode of creative refashioning, is redefined as one who undertakes “to face the task of producing himself”, a production that can only take place “in another, a different place, which Baudelaire calls art”. Negatively defining Enlightenment, Foucault still seeks, at this point, to effect a critical relation which avoids the “Enlightenment blackmail” and which does not conflate humanism and Enlightenment. Positively speaking, Foucault situates the Enlightenment ethos as the transformation of Kantian critique into a lived exploration of “*limit-attitude*”, to transform it “into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over”. This leads to the necessity for a historicised critique, to avoid the universal values that are bestowed by criticism that seeks formal structures, a critique that must also be experimental: “I shall thus characterize the philosophical ethos appropriate to the

critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings”.

Much of Pynchon's historicity lends itself to a reading in this vein. A way of re-conceptualising the anachronistic mode in *Mason & Dixon*, for example, would be to situate the characters as possessing a heightened sense of their modernity, at the dawn of modernity. Furthermore, several of Pynchon's novels end on an ironic heroization of the present, mostly because the present, or future, is apocalyptic, be it in *Gravity's Rainbow's* faux optimistic “Now everybody-”, *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice's* elegiac fogs for the Sixties, or *Against the Day's* airborne sailing towards “grace”, which seems to symmetrically parallel in its analeptic reference to World War I and re-insertion of the Calvinist theme, the earlier nautical climax to *V.* However, one of the most prominent critiques that could be levelled at Pynchon's work is that such an ironic heroization is not deployed to imagine otherwise, but to nihilistically mourn and nostalgically lament for a repeated cycle of failure, perhaps now coming to Blicero's escape, in no positive sense. This has been none more so pronounced than in Slothrop's disintegration in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

Slothrop, as noted, at least as early as the Anubis era, has begun to thin, to scatter. “Personal density,” Kurt Mondaugen in his Peene-münde office not too many steps away from here, enunciating the Law which will one day bear his name, “is directly proportional to temporal bandwidth.”

“Temporal bandwidth” is the width of your present, your now. It is the familiar “At” considered as a dependent variable. The more you dwell in the past and in the future, the thicker your bandwidth, the more solid your persona. But the narrower your sense of Now, the more tenuous you are. It may get to where you're having trouble remembering what you were doing five minutes ago, or even—as Slothrop now—what you're doing here, at the base of this colossal curved embankment. . . .

In the period between 1975 and 1981, no fewer than six critical articles examined this passage, finding it symptomatic of a dis-empowered contemporary subject. Although this passage has, obviously, been debated *ad nauseum* in Pynchon studies, its

importance for thinking on freedom within an Enlightenment context has been overlooked. From an initial objection to Pynchon as a critic, but also product, of modernity, comes a stunning resonance with late Foucault's aforementioned statement on philosophical ethos: "a historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings". The relationship one has to oneself, which the late Foucault believes is the true sphere of ethics, is the area with the greatest scope for agency for the historically contingent subject. Given also that Pynchon has written in *praise* of sloth - with particular reference to Melville's *Bartleby* as a refusal of the capitalist paradigm (yet does not the cycle of efficiency and then human redundancy push people ever closer to a mandatory idleness?) - it would appear hugely inconsistent for Pynchon to judge his nominatively assonative protagonist for refusing to work, even if that work is on the relationship to himself, through time. For is not Slothrop's "sin" a refusal to work against the entropy of the subject in a blindness to history?

It would seem superficially, from his sloth essay, that a Pynchonian ethics cannot regard inaction as unethical. Pynchon begins this work with an examination of Thomas de Aquinas' concept of *acedia* as sorrow in the face of God's good. However, Pynchon quickly moves through the historical progression to see, in Franklin's Poor John, a transformation of Sloth from a sin of sorrow in the face of God's good, to one of sorrow in the face of capitalism's good:

Spiritual matters were not quite as immediate as material ones, like productivity! Sloth was no longer so much a Sin against God or spiritual good as against a particular sort of time, uniform, one-way, in general not reversible -- that is, against clock time, which got everybody early to bed and early to rise.

Sloth here becomes a transgressive act that violates the compulsion to productive action and is, therefore, a form of resistance. Of course, such a stance is troubling in our contemporary understanding of Sloth as a failure to act against political evil, and Pynchon understands this:

In this century we have come to think of Sloth as primarily political, a failure of public will allowing the introduction of evil policies and the rise of evil regimes, the worldwide fascist ascendancy of the 1920's and 30's being perhaps Sloth's finest hour, though the Vietnam era and the Reagan-Bush years are not far behind. [...] Occasions for choosing good present themselves in public and private for us every day, and we pass them by. Acedia is the vernacular of everyday moral life. Though it has never lost its deepest notes of mortal anxiety, it never gets as painful as outright despair, or as real, for it is despair bought at a discount price, a deliberate turning against faith in anything because of the inconvenience faith presents to the pursuit of quotidian lusts, angers and the rest. The compulsive pessimist's last defense -- stay still enough and the blade of the scythe, somehow, will pass by -- Sloth is our background radiation, our easy-listening station -- it is everywhere, and no longer noticed.

As one might expect, then, Pynchon does not present a unified stance on Sloth. In one capacity, or perhaps at one historical moment, Sloth offered an escape from linear time; it was the resistance. Somewhere along this line of thought, however, the process was reversed and Sloth became seen as complicit. The only linking factor between these historical periods has been a moral disdain towards Sloth by the dominant authority. However, Sloth in itself cannot be a universal sin, in Pynchon's view, because it turns upon an evaluation of the contingent underlying moral concept. This is, in fact, the same argument that Aquinas deployed for a universal injunction against Sloth and with which Pynchon begins in apparent antagonism: "For sorrow is evil in itself when it is about that which is apparently evil but good in reality, even as, on the other hand, pleasure is evil if it is about that which seems to be good but is, in truth, evil". The actual alignment here can be seen, however, even in the working title of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "Mindless Pleasures", in which there is the conflation of Aquinian thinking and confusion ("mindless" and "which seems to be") with ascetic morality ("pleasures"). In short, the stance that can be derived from the Sloth essay is that Pynchonian ethics comes down to judgement of a contingent action's validity while Aquinian morality proposes a universal action as a safeguard against misjudgement.

Understanding Pynchon as one who disavows universally valid moral action, this reading moves a step-closer to a Foucauldian "historico-practical test of the limits we

may go beyond”, but with an important inflection. First, it should be carefully noted that this brand of relativism is diametrically opposed to the conventional genealogy of morals; it is not the underlying moral precept (opposition to Fascism, opposition to oppression) which is relative – indeed, this is still an open possibility, but not explicitly touched upon in Pynchon's essay – but instead, the action one should take (it is wrong to be slothful when Sloth will permit Fascism, but it is not wrong to be slothful if Sloth counters fiscal oppression). In this sense, Pynchon does not present the conventional and oft-critiqued, although not entirely accurate, version of a Foucauldian contingent subject, but rather the later Foucauldian subject of modernity who fashions himself and for whom there is limited personal agency. Second, to understand Pynchon's writing on temporal bandwidth it becomes necessary to take Foucauldian genealogy further than it would traditionally stretch in terms, as already mentioned, of trans-temporal metaphor.

Yet, the second half of Foucault's proposition – the link to work upon the self as a free being – is not an area in which Slothrop excels. While he does indeed, in his scattering and disassembly, transcend the human's limits, his realm of agency is seriously limited: he is “sent into the Zone”, his fate as determined as Weissman's by the tarot and his subconscious; “to help him deny what he could not possibly admit: that he might be in love, in sexual love, with his, and his race's, death”. This portion of *Gravity's Rainbow* is, however, enveloped in an exceedingly complex narrative structure. The voice proclaiming that Slothrop's fate was bound up in esoteric tarot systems cuts, across the ellipses, to “world-renowned analyst Mickey Wuxtry-Wuxtry” for the restriction of agency via psychoanalysis, before moving to an unexpected format, an interview of a “spokesman for the Counterforce” with the *Wall Street Journal*. This relegation of Slothrop to third party discussion is in keeping with the low levels of linguistic transitivity – a feature examined in “Under the Rose” and *V.* by M. Angeles Martínez – and, therefore, agency throughout *GR*; consider, for instance, the



famous passage:

The letters:

MB DRO  
ROSHI

appear above the logo of some occupation newspaper, a grinning  
glamour girl riding astraddle the cannon of a tank

Rather than presenting this as a statement actively read by Slothrop, the sentence contains only an affected object intransitively appearing; certainly an apt representation for such a brutal event as an atomic bombing.

It is not necessary, however, to resort to such formalist analysis to see this constriction of agency. The Counterforce has been styled – in as parodic a fashion as though it were, itself, named “Wuxtry-Wuxtry” – as childlike throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*. Although Terry Caeser has linked the “suck hour” in *V.* and the “Gross Suckling Conference” in *GR* to maternity, it is in fact the flip-side of this relationship that is being explored: the state of childhood. This is clearly seen in the linked context of *Against the Day*, where Darby Suckling is described, in the opening pages, as the “baby” of the crew, which leads to the more likely conclusion that “Gross Suckling” is less of a reflection on the transition from maternity to motherhood, and more a statement on the immaturity, or baby-ness, of the Counterforce effort, further confirmed by the German rendition: “Der Grob Säugling”. The Counterforce is as incapable of commenting on Slothrop's limitations as any other, for “They are schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us”. It seems that, in Pynchon's terms, human beings are psychologically incapable of mounting a resistance in the face of external temptation: “As long as they allow us a glimpse, however rarely. We need that”. While this in no sense precludes agency in the relation to one's self, it does encroach upon the impact such a self-fashioning could ever have. In its immaturity, the Counterforce must be deemed unenlightened.

The final portion of Foucault's last Enlightenment piece is a pre-emptive rebuff to a “no doubt entirely legitimate” objection: “If we limit ourselves to this type of

always partial and local inquiry or test, do we not run the risk of letting ourselves be determined by more general structures of which we may well not be conscious and over which we may have no control?" To this, Foucault gives two responses. We must, firstly, "give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge [*connaissance*] or what may constitute our historical limits". From here, "the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and of the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined". However, "that does not mean that no work can be done except in disorder and contingency", it must instead be probed in the question: "how can the growth of capabilities [*capacités*] be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?" This can only be studied by analysing concrete practices consisting of the "forms of rationality that organize their ways of doing things" ("their technological side") and the actions of subjects which reflexively modify this *techne* ("their strategic side"). This is to be explored through "relations of control over things" ("the axis of knowledge"), "relations of action upon others" ("the axis of power") and "relations with oneself" ("the axis of ethics").

This seems, then, to be the aporetic final structure upon which Pynchon's works come to rest. Even if we are able, in some sense, to determine ourselves as subjects, partial knowledge means there is always the potential for larger, unknown structures to impinge upon that determination with little opportunity for feedback. Amid ever narrowing opportunities for the "good unsought and uncompensated" - for how would we know them? - is a Voltarian hortensial contraction even possible? Foucault suggests that maintaining a positivist approach is viable, as long as there exists a concerted effort to decouple progress from the amplification of power relations. On the other hand, Pynchon's intrinsic linkage of the spheres of identity and concrete practices, that Foucault here separates, is clear from his closing remarks in "Nearer My Couch to Thee": "what now seems increasingly to define us - technology". This has

the effect of extending the sphere of the ethical beyond the Foucauldian axis of ethics; ipseic relations are not disentangled from, but progressively knotted into the world, to paraphrase *GR*. Furthermore, the strategic elements, the failed Counterforce, the Chums of Chance, Mason and Dixon are not foiled because they are unaware of the overarching structures that determine them, but because from Pynchon's psychological, humanist approach it is deduced that they are intrinsically incapable of non-complicity. In regard to the seamy underside of the Enlightenment, the divide between Pynchon and Foucault seems to hinge on what we can, in both a Kantian and practical sense, know, not necessarily, as has always been supposed, on who, or how, we can dominate, for according to Pynchon: "We do know what's going on, and we let it go on".