



A Critical Theory of the Self: Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Foucault

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Abstract. Critical thinking, considered as a version of informal logic, must consider emotions and personal attitudes in assessing assertions and conclusions in any analysis of discourse. It must therefore presuppose some notion of the self. Critical theory may be seen as providing a substantive and non-neutral position for the exercise of critical thinking. It therefore must presuppose some notion of the self. This paper argues for a Foucauldian position on the self to extend critical theory and provide a particular position on the self for critical thinking. This position on the self is developed from more traditional accounts of the self from Descartes to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein.

Key words: self, care of the self, critical theory, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Foucault

All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of 'man' as an aeterna veritas, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything that the philosopher has declared about man is, however, at bottom no more than a testimony as to the man of a very limited period of time. Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers . . . what is needed from now on is historical philosophizing, and with it the virtue of modesty (Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*).

Introduction

Critical thinking is normally considered as a version of informal logic which 'examines the nature and function of arguments in natural language, stressing the craft rather than the formal reasoning'.¹ Whilst then there is room for assessing the context in which assertions are made and conclusions are drawn, including the intrusion of emotions and personal attitudes, conceived in this manner it may still rest as an essentially neutral enterprise, like formal logic. Critical thinking then would lack the force of *critical* to be found, eg, in the writings of the Frankfurt school. In this latter sense of 'critical' we encounter not merely skills of informal logic but also a theory of how to think critically which, starting from particular moral, social and political premises is no longer neutral.

It is this latter sense of ‘critical’ which I wish to address in this paper. Much has been written in philosophy of education about critical thinking and, indeed, critical theory (especially on Habermas) but I wish to extend the notion of a theory of critical thinking to include a critical theory of the self. It would be a theory which adopted Nietzsche’s injunction to abandon the search for ‘man’ as an aeterna veritas and instead to see ‘man’ in an historical sense as a result of historical philosophising.

I will attempt this by starting with traditional views of the self, including Schopenhauer’s and Wittgenstein’s ‘mysterious’ self, arguing that Foucault’s account of the self, influenced by Nietzsche, goes beyond traditional approaches to the self, especially dualistic positions. Foucault’s *problematizing* notion of the self² denies that the self is a substance (aeterna veritas), and in going beyond binary oppositions, is a positive life affirming account of the possibilities for human beings. To that extent, I would claim, it is worthy of being seen as ‘critical’, and thereby as contributing to critical thinking.

Conceptions of Critical Theory

Nietzsche provided a totalising critique of the Enlightenment but his critique culminated not just in a fusion of validity and power but a replacement of the will to truth with the will to power. This is the path to be taken by Foucault though, unlike Nietzsche, he (arguably) does not advance a theory of power. This is the path that Habermas thought was wrong.³ Habermas criticises Horkheimer and Adorno (and implicitly, Nietzsche and Foucault) for being “so unappreciative of the rational content of cultural modernity that all they perceive everywhere is a binding of reason and domination, of power and validity”.⁴ This comment would apply also to Foucault.

Some versions of critical theory depend upon specifically marxist concepts such as the mode of production and domination (capitalist or socialist), or some version of ideology, or of alienation. In the case of the former, as Foucault points out, there are more forms of domination than economic domination. Indeed he shows how the discourses associated with the human sciences have produced forms of domination which are not the outcomes of capitalism but were instead needed by capitalism in its rapid expansion in the nineteenth century. Here we have a fusion of reason and domination, but there is a way out from domination for Foucault, which rests upon the self and the self’s exercise of freedom.⁵ This was to be achieved, Foucault argued, by a certain notion of a critical self, a self which engaged in an ongoing critique. First, what did Foucault himself mean by ‘critique’?

Foucault⁶ had addressed the question ‘What is critique?’ at the Société Française de Philosophie on 27 May 1978.⁷ In typical fashion he dissociates himself on this question from his distinguished philosophical forbears who used the term ‘critique’ in the titles of their major works. In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the term ‘critique’ is used

to uncover what is masked or hidden as general assumptions: in Kant's case the necessary apriori assumptions of pure reason; and in Marx's case such things as the historically related conditions of the mode of production under capitalism which determined human relationships and class divisions. Nor did Foucault employ the term 'critique' in the manner of the German theorists in their notion of *critical theory*.

According to Miller,⁸ in summarising Foucault's position in this paper and his response to philosophers in his audience, Foucault saw 'critique' as an attitude, or as 'a virtue'. Hence his preliminary definition was 'the art of not being governed' or, because this art had to arise in a specific context, 'the art of not being governed in a certain way and at a certain price' (ibid.). Foucault considers the genealogy of this notion from the Reformation to the 17th and 18th centuries, and how it raised anew the "problem of certainty in the face of authority". Foucault summarised this long development of critique as "the movement by which the subject is given the right to discover the truth" by exercising "an art of voluntary insubordination, of thoughtful disobedience".

We should note the emphasis placed by Foucault upon the self's refusal to be subjected. But, given that power can only be exercised upon a free agent, and not upon a slave in chains, and that for Foucault freedom must be continuously exercised if it is not to be lost, then the liberty of the subject is an important presupposition of the exercise of freedom.⁹ Thereby one can see why refusing to be subjected or subordinated must be associated with attaining and maintaining liberty. But this requires the self to be reflective upon itself and to be constantly vigilant against ever dangerous forms of subjugation or domination of the self. In adopting forms of thoughtful disobedience against perceived dangers of domination, the self itself must change. I am proposing that the self cannot be taken as a fixed and immutable given, as in many traditional accounts of the self. Before turning to this theory of the self we will look at more traditional accounts.

Traditional Accounts of the Self

DESCARTES TO HUME

Descartes can be accused of initiating a 'bump' in philosophical discussions of the self. His emphasis on cognition in the famous dictum, 'cogito, ergo sum', entails that in so far as I exist then my identity depends and consists in the fact that I am a thinking *substance* or *being* (ie, *individuated* object), and that there is a fundamental dualism between mind and body. This leads to a number of difficulties and problems. First, we will look briefly at Locke's and Hume's reactions to this Cartesian position.

Locke, in his *Essay concerning the Human Understanding*,¹⁰ discusses several notions of identity, beginning his discussion by categorising four types of identity. These are, he says: identity of matter; identity of organised biological matter such as vegetables; identity of animals, and; personal identity. Locke is not merely

showing that 'identity' has several meanings, but rather that attention must be paid to differences in our understanding of identity. Thus Locke treats personal identity as an individuated substance and that the criteria of identity were in consciousness: "it being the same consciousness. . . personal identity depends on that only". Thus Locke concludes his discussion of personal identity by asserting that if I who was Socrates am now the present Mayor of Queenborough then that is so. Thus the self is identified with consciousness, and the identity of the self depends upon the same consciousness, ie, an identity statement asserting the same consciousness over a time interval.

Hume says that identity is a *relation* which a thing has to itself, thus commencing with the logically pure schema "a = a", as properly representing the philosophical relation of identity. But he does have doubts about this philosophical notion, saying: "We cannot in any propriety of speech, say, that an object is the same with itself, unless we mean, that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another".¹¹ Hence, in asserting a relation of identity, what we are trying to express is a proposition of form "a = b", but this is somehow inadequate. This is because a proposition of this contingent form, "a = b", does not have the logical purity of the proposition 'a = a'. The philosophical problem which now arises is that as we cannot *reason* from "a = b" to "a = a", or indeed vice versa, then we cannot be *certain* of identity.

But if we cannot establish identity by reason, nor can we establish it from observation. If it were thought that at least continuous observation between time t1 to time t2 would establish a contingent identity statement Hume's response is that far from establishing a relation of identity this would only establish *unity*.¹² Thus Hume is led to conclude in typical 'sceptical' fashion that identity "can never arise from reason, but must arise from the imagination".¹³ Thus on personal identity Hume ends by asserting that personal identity is merely a series or collection of impressions/ideas, without any substantial underpinning entity to provide any unity, and that the notion of identity as a relation arises from the imagination. Therefore we cannot be *certain* about identity statements.

If, following these general discussions, my very being depends upon clear and distinct ideas in consciousness, and my identity depends upon memory, and I am in no way logically dependent upon my body, then perhaps I could change bodies. This contingently absurd but logical possibility is pursued extensively by Shoemaker.¹⁴ He talks of a mind/body operation in which two minds are removed from their accompanying bodies and inserted in the other body. It seems from the premises provided in the tradition that such an operation is logically possible and whilst this might be of considerable interest to neo-liberal neuro-surgeons such notions were dismissed by Wittgenstein somewhat scathingly.¹⁵ Certainly such thinking was indicative of people who didn't know their way about.¹⁶

Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein

Rousseau had made objections to this Cartesian notion of the self. Arguably, Rousseau is the first writer to bring a clearly defined notion of self, an ordinary self, and that of a largely atomistic and autonomous self, above the threshold of visibility in Western thinking.¹⁷ Rousseau was concerned to draw limits to the domain of reason and its over evaluation. Instead, in his 'atomistic' self it is the emotions which provide the basis for individuality or the self. Rousseau did not believe that what we need to become better as individual human beings, is more reason and more rationally based learning, for that would presuppose some Cartesian notion of a self sufficiently transparent to be both made fully transparent by reason and, also to be made better by reason. Instead of rationality laying bare the nature of the self by excluding all that belonged to the social through a harsh application of binary logic, the self does not become transparent for Rousseau, and rests as a muddle and a puzzle. It is certainly not logically simple. By rational standards it is therefore incomprehensible. Reason cannot penetrate this confusion and muddle. If muddle and confusion are not amenable to being penetrated and made clear by reason then it is difficult to see how the self can be made better by reason, for what aspects of the self could be identified in such muddle and confusion sufficiently well, if at all, in order for them to be made better?

Thus, early in *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*¹⁸ Rousseau says: "I felt before I thought". This is then not merely a rejection of the metaphysics of rationality being definitive of the self as is inherent in Descartes' Cogito, 'I think, therefore I am', nor a rejection of arid rationalism, especially materialistic and mechanistic interpretations of human being, but instead an affirmative expression of the emotive life as the basis for the self.¹⁹ Wittgenstein's anti-Cartesianism was hardly original. It is most likely that Wittgenstein was made aware, and perhaps first made aware of these objections, in his early reading of Schopenhauer. Objections to the Cartesian notion of the self are also to be found in Nietzsche (and these were probably as influential upon Foucault as the anti-humanist thrust of structuralism).

The early influences upon Schopenhauer's philosophy were Kantian,²⁰ but Schopenhauer also believed that metaphysics was possible. In arguing that experience can be a source of metaphysics he parted company with Kant.

For Schopenhauer we are not passive disembodied spectators of a world of objects. Instead we are essentially embodied and active. The world for Schopenhauer is *my* representation. By this he means that the world is only that which appears to the representing subject, ie a world of objects, and the world is exhausted in its perceptability. The world of objects of which we have knowledge is a world of *appearance* but for there to be objects there must also be subjects.

For Schopenhauer the self or the subject is never an object and therefore cannot be an appearance for the subject, Yet a subject is necessary for there to be objects. Thus the subject is not in space and time, but is like an eye, an eye which cannot see itself, yet which mirrors the world. But the eye which cannot be seen constitutes

limits on what is seen, and on the world. It would be mistaken to argue from the fact that the subject does not exist in the objective world that it did not exist or was illusory or a mere nothing. The point made by the eye image of the 'I' is merely that the subject is not something which is to be found in the world of objects. As Janaway says:²¹ "No one with a Schopenhauerean background would think that the non-objective status of the subject entailed its illusoriness".

But the self is not merely a representer of the world because there is the *will*. First he distinguishes knowledge of objects from knowledge of our willed actions. The will for Schopenhauer is not to be distinguished or separated from action. We do not will and cause an action, nor do we make inferences from our observed actions to our willing those actions. Will *is* action. Instead of some mental act of willing issuing in some bodily movement, my will is expressed in action. My will is thus embodied. As I have knowledge of my will, in a form of immediate knowledge, I have access to the self, not provided to the I of the eye of representation. Willing thus has priority over the intellect in Schopenhauer's thought and this is used to launch an attack upon the rational and transparent self of Descartes et al. The will in us is also the will to life, an urge to live and to go on living.

However, because of the dictates of the will we are bound to be in an almost continual 'state of anguish and despair, tormented if not driven by desires and unseen forces that we can never fully comprehend, control or satisfy. Schopenhauer as metaphysician does not present us then with anything optimistic about either the human condition or the possibilities for the human condition (eg, emancipation). Rather all such hope is misplaced. The minimal solution to this state of affairs is to restrict as far as possible the operation of the will, through such things as fasting and celibacy. Or we can escape from the will according to Schopenhauer through aesthetic experience, because we can be so involved in contemplation of the object, that we cease to evaluate it in terms of our needs and desires and, cease to will. Thus Schopenhauer sees us as becoming closest to reality through *aesthetic* experiences. This awareness cannot be communicated however and all that philosophy can do is bring us to the brink of such comprehension. As Schopenhauer says of philosophy:²²

Its theme must restrict itself to the world; to express from every aspect *what* the world *is*, what it *may be* in its innermost nature, is all that it can honestly achieve. . . Now it is precisely here that the mystic proceeds positively, and therefore, from this point nothing is left but mysticism.

Wittgenstein was influenced by Schopenhauer, particularly on the notion that the self was not an individuated substance, and that 'I' did not refer to a substantive self. He does not however advance beyond a negative position on the self. According to Sluga²³ for Wittgenstein either 'I' referred to the body, which seems to be one interpretation of his comments on the 'I', or it referred to nothing, which is the other interpretation. However, if there is nothing in the world of objects that is referred to by 'I', nothing can be 'done' from cultural, social and historical

influences, essentially in the world of objects, to something not in the world of objects. This position on the self would permit a disengagement from a society seen as in an irreversible state of decay. This dark reading of Schopenhauer's theoretical position on the self is arguably adopted by Wittgenstein.²⁴

Thus in the *Notebooks*,²⁵ in a section clearly influenced by Schopenhauer:

The thinking subject is surely mere illusion. But the willing subject exists. . . The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious. The I is not an object. I objectively confront every object. But not the I.

And in the *Philosophical Investigations*:²⁶ “‘I’ is not the name of a person, nor ‘here’ of a place, and ‘this’ is not a name”.

It would appear that ‘I’ does not *refer* to what we normally think of as a self, soul, subject, or person, given that to name is to refer. The I is a mystery, and it is certainly not an object. Indeed there is an ongoing hostility in Wittgenstein's writings to any notion of a substantive and individuated self. Yet late in his life he is to say: “But it is still false to say. . . I is a different person from LW”.²⁷ These two quotations open up a possible paradox of the self in Wittgenstein's writings, for how can ‘I’ not refer to a self, but not be a different person from LW? This is the paradox which is resolved in Wittgenstein's later writings, if at all, only by his account of language and the notion of how first person statements *express* rather than describe things such as pain.

Whereas for Schopenhauer the eye (I) sets the limits of the world, for Wittgenstein it is language. In the *Philosophical Investigations*²⁸ he also said that ‘I’ explains a name. To understand this we must consider the conditions under which ‘I’ is learned and how ‘I’ is taught to children, for it can be argued from a broadly Wittgensteinian position that there is a kind of logical connection between the meaning of some concepts and the conditions under which they are taught and/or learned.²⁹ Wittgenstein's position is not that there are causal relations between a concept and the actual events or processes of teaching and learning, but rather a kind of logical relation between the *concepts* that are learned and the ‘concepts’ of teaching and learning. Thus certain general facts constitute a background situation against which particular concepts are learned. Thus the use of ‘I’ needs to be understood against the ‘logical’ background in which we acquire meaning for the concept ‘I’ and this has further bearing upon how we use ‘I’ in utterances such as ‘I am LW’. Thus “I am in pain” does not describe a mental state held by someone referred to by ‘I’ but is, instead, a sophisticated *expression* of pain behaviour.

According to Hans Sluga³⁰ (1996): “To trace Wittgenstein's discussion of the self, means . . . to trace the complex web of connections between questions of mind and language”. This complex tracking cannot be done here,³¹ but essentially Wittgenstein should be seen as holding an expressive view of identity utterances.³²

Nietzsche

The reading of Nietzsche that has influenced both Heidegger and Foucault, amongst others, is that of a cultural physician. Here there is an attempt to liberate us in a therapeutic manner from the need to ask, pursue and theorise about the traditional and perennial philosophical questions. This notion of philosophy as therapy is also to be found in the later Wittgenstein who said:³³ 'A philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about"'. On this interpretation of philosophy as therapy, which can be traced to at least the ancient Greeks and, more recently, to Hume, philosophy is therapeutic and calms, diverts, or rejects a great majority of the perennial philosophical questions and answers. For Wittgenstein traditional (academic) philosophy asks the wrong questions and provides misleading theoretical answers to them because, mistaking the apparent form of a proposition for its proper logical form by reference to its grammar, we end in a series of perennial puzzles. These puzzles are caused because language has gone on holiday. The therapy then is for the self not to be misled by such questions; it is not to attempt to solve them by pursuing academic philosophy for that may only lead to great anxiety for the self.

Nietzsche was strongly influenced and heavily indebted to Schopenhauer's (1819) *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*.³⁴ Here Christopher Janaway³⁵ says that Nietzsche's most radical views can be traced to Schopenhauer's conception of the subject as both willing and knowing. A common view of Nietzsche is that he comes to abandon the Schopenhauerian pessimism that permeates *The Birth of Tragedy*³⁶ and to adopt a much more positive approach to life and culture. That is to interpret him as a positivist reconstructivist. However the extent to which Nietzsche abandons his earlier pessimism is not clear. Is his positive way forward merely a way of ameliorating the fundamentally impossible situation in which humans find themselves (according to Schopenhauer), or is it a way of liberating the self from those conditions?

A central criticism by Nietzsche of Schopenhauer's metaphysics however is that the self remains a riddle, an 'it', to which Schopenhauer can only offer a guess – the will. The 'I', as a thing in itself, is indefensible, according to Nietzsche, and cannot be predicated with the attributes which Schopenhauer wishes to attach to the will, because³⁷ in Janaway, 1989: 343):

A totally obscure, inconceivable x is draped with predicates, as with bright coloured clothes which are taken from a world alien to it, the world of appearance. Then the demand is that we should regard the surrounding clothes, that is the predicates, as the thing itself. . . .

In *The Birth of Tragedy*³⁸ Nietzsche introduces Schopenhauer's distinction between the knowing subject as the eye, or pure representing subject, and the self as will through the distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. In Schopenhauer the individual self (will) is known through a relationship with the body for the body and the will are one. The movements of the body or will can be

known immediately as they are expressions of the will. But for Nietzsche this is merely metaphysics and in its place we have the body, reunited with animals and the earth and the Dionysian frenzy rather than the Apollonian reason and intellect.

Foucault on the Self

From 1979 Michel Foucault began to pursue questions of the self vigorously, particularly in his important article ‘What is Enlightenment?’³⁹ (Foucault, 1984c). His question was: “who are we in the present, what is this fragile moment from which we can’t detach our identity and which will carry that identity away with itself?” In Nietzschean fashion he was to answer this question by turning to experience, as opposed to starting from a committed and perhaps theoretical philosophical position, and ask questions about *how* we constitute the self. As he said:⁴⁰

What I rejected was the idea of starting out with a theory of the subject . . . What I wanted to try to show was how the subject constituted itself, in one specific form or another . . . it is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not always identical to itself . . . in each case one plays, one establishes a different relation to oneself.

His question of experience is a ‘How?’ question, and not the more traditional philosophical questions such as “What is a self?”, and, “What are the criteria of identity for selves?” Rather, for Foucault, in order to grasp our experience one must stay close to the modern – to everyday events – and to experience them, be willing to be affected by them and to effect them. What mattered for the Foucault of post-1968 Vincennes and the 1970s was “experience *with* . . . rather than engagement *in*” . . . (quoted in Rabinow 1997, p.xix. [My emphasis]). “Who one was, Foucault wrote, emerges acutely out of the problems with which one struggles”.⁴¹

But we should also note a shift in his approach away from looking at the philosophical history of concepts such as madness towards issues of problematisation. Problematisation is concerned with objects, but with how they are introduced into thought. In particular:⁴²

Problematisation doesn’t mean representation of a pre-existing object, nor the creation by discourse of an object that doesn’t exist. It is the totality of discursive or non-discursive practices that introduces something into the play of the true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.).

His questions are concerned then with how one controls oneself, and how this control is integrated into practices with others. Thus his fundamental question is concerned with how one practices one’s freedom, for that is the essence of ethics for Foucault.

Foucault is not interested in the mystical view of the ‘I’ that is to be found in Schopenhauer and in the earlier Wittgenstein. Nevertheless the self is not some-

thing which is open to biological, sociological, etc. description. For Foucault the Man which is dead, and cannot serve as a posit of 'human' theory, is not just *the* Man of the human sciences, with all of the humanistic baggage that Man there carries. It is also the subject post Kant to which these attributes are accorded, which is not the mystical self of Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein.

Even so the self is not something which is a given. Instead he holds a Nietzschean position:⁴³ "Be yourself. You are none of the things you now do, think, desire". Miller says⁴⁴ that this was Schopenhauer's influence upon Nietzsche, and Nietzsche's upon Foucault. Furthermore for both Nietzsche and Foucault: "Our body is but a social structure"⁴⁵ and the self is contingent, and hanging because of shifting social and cultural forces.⁴⁶ They both reject the metaphysical 'I' of Schopenhauer, seeing the self as being constructed by customs, practices and institutions in which we live and grow (cf. Wittgenstein on forms of life). As these are not ultimate givens, therefore *we* can change. Nietzsche thought that we had come to hate the body and its Dionysian untamed frenzies because of Christianity, and thus deeply immersed in social and cultural traditions it was difficult "to become what one is". For Nietzsche of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁴⁷ it begins with the discovery of the Dionysian frenzy of life by communing again with the world, and to transcend the self that appears as a given: for the later Foucault it is to care for the self. For both Nietzsche and Foucault: "Nobody can build you the bridge over which you must cross the river of life, nobody but you alone".⁴⁸

In his earlier writings on the constitution of the self,⁴⁹ Foucault had seen coercive forces and practices as dominating selves, as he treated power as *repressive*. Later he is to drop the concept of repression, because "repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power . . . (and) this (repression) is a wholly negative, narrow skeletal conception of power",⁵⁰ though warlike metaphors are retained as late as 1983. Like Nietzsche, power is productive, it creates or makes people, it can be positive and not merely negative and it is this later positive notion of power which is to be found in his later writings.

Foucault claims that the Delphic maxim, 'to know yourself', has supplanted the other notion of Greek antiquity, "to take care of yourself". He argues that the "need to take care for oneself brought the Delphic maxim into operation" and that the latter was subordinated to the former. In modern Western culture, he claims, the notion of caring for oneself has come to be seen as narcissistic, as an immorality, and as a means of escape from rules and respect for law. Given further the Christian inheritance that the road to salvation lies through self-renunciation to know oneself seems paradoxically the road to self-renunciation and salvation. Secondly, he argues, theoretical philosophy since Descartes has placed ever-increasing importance upon knowledge of the self as the first step in epistemology. His conclusion is that the order of priority of these two maxims has become reversed; 'know thyself' has assumed priority over care for the self.

The self for Foucault is stated reasonably clearly:⁵¹ "... it is not a substance. It is a form, and this form is not always identical to itself in each case one plays, one

establishes a different relation to oneself". If the self is not an individuated object or substance, but is, rather a form, or something conceptual, then our conceptualising of ourselves at any particular time may take up differences, in a complex interplay of intellect, character and action. A form here is like a category (the self) which may be filled in various ways. Thus you may not have the same relationship to yourself when you constitute yourself as a political subject to speak at a meeting and as a father speaking to a daughter or son prior to the meeting. We cannot assert an identity relationship such as "a = b" between these two forms, because these two forms may not be identical. Put another way his concern is with how the intellect, character and action, can be reconciled in living in the context of practical affairs in the present. The singularity of the present in its games of truth and practices of power may either require a certain form of the self, or present the opportunity to constitute one's self actively in a form of transfiguration of other forms of the self. But these practices are not something entirely invented, as we are influenced by models. We are also influenced by mentors. All of these models must be subjected to historical and philosophical examination. Care for the self, in Foucault's hands, is to be a form of exercise upon the self and not a Schopenhauerean renunciation of the self, or a form of Wittgensteinian resignation that not much can be done.

This knowledge which one has of the forms that the self takes (*se connaître*) is active and highly political as it was for the Greeks. For the philosopher this becomes doubly so, "in terms of intensity, in the degree of zeal for the self, and consequently, also for others, the place of the philosopher is not that of just any free man".⁵² Here he was assigning a special role for the philosopher, one which Wittgenstein was reluctant to assign. But in Foucault's case it was a role which was academic for it was also scholarly, though it was philosophy not in the normal and more traditional academic sense but in a very overt sense of the political.

Care for the self is not to be seen as a form of *liberation*, but as "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being".⁵³ This mode of being is not that of the liberated or unalienated person as, in versions of marxist theory, it runs the risk of returning to some notion of human being or essence to which one can return by breaking repressive deadlocks. Indeed practising freedom requires liberation but liberation *per se* does not define for us the practices of freedom (*loc cit.*), for freedom must be practised ethically: "... for what is ethics, if not the practice of freedom." Freedom is said to be "the ontological condition of ethics" but "ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection".⁵⁴

Care of the self is ethical he argues not because it is care of others but because it is ethical *in itself*. It does however imply complex relationships with others "as this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others".⁵⁵ It is not therefore merely self regarding or narcissistic. *Ethos* involves a relationship with others, which comes about because of the way in which the self and care of the self becomes known. Here Foucault argues one needs a guide or mentor who can speak truthfully to one, who will not be authoritarian or manipulative, and who will teach one. Thus

relationships with others are built into the very conditions of the learning of, or the development of, the care of the self. To learn to care for the self is then at one and the same time to learn to care for others. Nevertheless: “Care for others then should not be put before the care of oneself. The care of the self is ethically prior in that the relationship with oneself is ontologically prior”.⁵⁶

Conclusion

This is clearly a different view of problematisation and critique from say marxism, where fundamental questions need to be asked about such things as relations of production, alienation and the serving of interests. There a repressive aspect merely needs to be removed and problematisation of a series of given and taken for granted assumptions is often the first step. Thus, for example, fundamental questions need to be asked about the adage “A fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work” to expose capital. By changing the relations of production, repression and alienation can be addressed in marxist theory. But here we have binary oppositions in play between truth and falsity and good and evil – the bad is to be replaced by the good!

Foucault in his later life was developing a critique of neo-liberalism. In modern neoliberalism there is the notion of a self as an autonomous chooser⁵⁷ or utility maximiser, ie, of an atomistic individual capable of choosing, wishing to choose independently, and able to discern issues of quality and self interest in the choices offered in the freemarket. Matters of welfare and justice become the unintended outcomes of the hidden hand of the market. Clearly there is a political and intellectual burden from the past in this notion of the autonomous chooser – in Adam Smith (and to Robert Nozick) rather than in Adam Ferguson. Part of a Foucauldian project of problematisation would be to expose the forerunners and the opponents in 18th century thought, and thus that the present state of affairs was not inevitable. But it would also be to identify and expose the discourses and practices at national and global levels that have permitted utility maximisers to be almost taken universally as givens or *the* individuals in current economic, management, welfare and educational thought.

His position was not so much that individualism was wrong but that individualism needed an adequate account of the self, of relationships with Others, and of how one was to care for the self (and thereby Others) in the practice of freedom. On each of these parameters he has a critique of the autonomous chooser. His notion of the self as constituted forecloses on such things as self interest being part of a human nature. On the contrary, the self is constituted in a *pedagogical* relationship with Others, and as one learns how to constitute and control the self one also learns about Others and care of others in the practices of freedom. There is a very complex interrelation of dependence between the self and others, which starts as a mentor relationship and continues with mentoring relationships. This *governance* of the self was therefore also *governance* of others. And he thought governance of the

self could be accommodated within a wider political account of governance of populations.⁵⁸

But are we to call this a critical theory? Not much turns on a name, but in so far as Foucault's account tries, like Nietzsche, to advance beyond binary oppositions such as mind/body, I would see it that way. If emotions and personal attitudes can intrude into informal logic (and into critical thinking) then it is clear that a Foucauldean self, steeped in thoughtful disobedience, would not hold a neutral position in any discourse of natural language. Appraising the conclusions of critical thinking would therefore require one to have some conception of a self. In my view Foucault provides a powerful critical conception of the self for critical thinking within the liberal tradition.

Notes

¹ Honderich, T.: 1995, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York, p. 500.

² Foucault, M.: 1984a, 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom', in P. Rabinow (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth*, The New Press, New York, pp. 281–301.

³ Habermas, J.: 1987, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Polity Press, London, chaps 9–11.

⁴ Habermas, p. 121.

⁵ Foucault, M.: 1983, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, pp. 208–226.

⁶ Foucault, M.: 1978, 'Qu'est-ce-que la Critique', *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* **84**(2).

⁷ Miller, J.: 1993, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, Simon and Schuster, New York, p. 301.

⁸ Miller, 1993, p. 302.

⁹ Foucault, 1983.

¹⁰ Locke, J.: 1924, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford University Press, London (c1690), Bk.II, XXVII, 3–10.

¹¹ Hume, D.: 1888, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, London, Bk.I.IV,ii, p. 201.

¹² Hume, p. 201.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁴ Shoemaker, S.: 1963, *Self Knowledge and Self Identity*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, L.: 1975, *Philosophical Remarks*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, # 60–66.

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, L.: 1953, *Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, # 123.

¹⁷ Gutman, H.: 1988, 'Rousseau's Confessions: A Technology of the Self', in L.H. Martin, H. Gutman and P.H. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, pp. 99–120. Compare, Taylor, C.: 1989, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. (Taylor however, places Rousseau in a 'longer' theoretical tradition).

¹⁸ Rousseau, J.-J.: 1953, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (c1781).

¹⁹ (Cf. the metaphysics of the self in Simone de Beauvoir's early novels. 1954: *She Came to Stay*, World Publishing, Cleveland (c 1943); 1948: *The Blood of Others*, Knopf, New York (c1945).

²⁰ Coppleston, S.J.: 1965, *A History of Philosophy*, **7**(2), Image Books, New York, p. 28.

- ²¹ Janaway, C.: 1989, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 328.
- ²² Schopenhauer, A.: 1966, *The World as Will and Representation*, Transl. E.F.J. Payne, Dover, New York (c1819), 2, p. 612.
- ²³ Sluga, H.: 1996, '“Whose Home is That?”: Wittgenstein on the self', in H. Sluga (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 320–353.
- ²⁴ Peters, M. and Marshall, J.: 1999, *Wittgenstein: Philosophy, Postmodernism, Pedagogy*, Bergin and Garvey, Westport, Con., chaps 3 & 4.
- ²⁵ Wittgenstein, L.: 1961, *Notebooks, 1914–1916*, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 80e.
- ²⁶ Wittgenstein, 1953, # 410.
- ²⁷ Wittgenstein, L.: 1982, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, in G.H. von Wright and H. Nyman (eds.), Blackwell, Oxford, 2, # 88.
- ²⁸ Wittgenstein, 1953, # 410.
- ²⁹ See, MacMillan, C.J.B.: 1985, 'Rational Teaching', *Teachers College Record* 86: 411–422 and McCarty, L.P. and D.C. McCarty: 1995, 'Wittgenstein on the Unreasonableness of Education: Connecting Teaching and Meaning', in P. Smeyers and J.D. Marshall (eds.), *Philosophy and Education: Accepting Wittgenstein's Challenge*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 63–76.
- ³⁰ Sluga, 1996.
- ³¹ But see Peters and Marshall, 1999.
- ³² Fogelin, R.J.: 1996, 'Wittgenstein's Critique of Philosophy', in H. Sluga (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 34–58.
- ³³ Wittgenstein, 1953, # 123.
- ³⁴ There were two major translations of this as *The World of Will and Idea* and *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer's preface to the original German edition is dated 1818 but it was probably published in 1819. The respective translations into English by Haldane and Kemp (1883) and Payne (1958) are somewhat different.
- ³⁵ Janaway, p. 342.
- ³⁶ Nietzsche, F.: 1966a, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Transl. Walter Kaufmann, Viking Press, New York.
- ³⁷ quoted in Janaway, p. 343.
- ³⁸ Nietzsche, 1966a, 1.
- ³⁹ Foucault, M.: 1984, 'What is Enlightenment?', in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, Pantheon, New York, pp. 32–50.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 290.
- ⁴¹ quoted in Rabinow, Paul (ed.): 1997, *Michel Foucault: Ethics, Subjectivity, Truth*, The New Press, New York, p. xix (my emphasis).
- ⁴² Foucault, M.: 1984, 'The Concern for Truth', in L.D. Kritzman (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, Routledge, London & New York, p. 257.
- ⁴³ Nietzsche, F.: 1983, *Untimely Meditations*, Transl. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 127.
- ⁴⁴ Miller, p. 69.
- ⁴⁵ Nietzsche, F.: 1966b, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Transl. W. Kaufmann, Viking Press, New York, p. 19.
- ⁴⁶ Nietzsche, F.: 1968, *The Will to Power*, Transl. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, Vintage Press, New York, p. 552.
- ⁴⁷ Nietzsche, F.: 1976, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in W. Kaufmann, Transl. & ed. *The Portable Nietzsche*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, pp. 103–429.
- ⁴⁸ Nietzsche, 1983, 129.
- ⁴⁹ see eg, Foucault, M.: 1979, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Vintage, New York.
- ⁵⁰ Foucault, M.: 1977, 'Truth and Power', in C. Gordon (ed.), 1980: *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Pantheon, New York, p. 119.
- ⁵¹ Foucault, 1984a, 290.

- 52 Ibid., p. 293
- 53 Ibid., p. 282.
- 54 Ibid., p. 284.
- 55 Ibid., p. 287.
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Marshall, J.D.: 1996, 'The Autonomous Chooser and 'Reforms' in Education', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, **15**(1), 89–96.
- 58 Gordon, C.: 1991, 'Introduction', in D. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, p. 47.

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