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Stephanie M Batters

Care of the Self and the Will to Freedom: Michel Foucault, Critique and Ethics

I. Why Critique?

"So we can't just ignore the problem. We have to find room in our contemporary world view for persons with all that that entails; not just bodies, but persons. And that means trying to solve the problem of freedom, finding room for choice and responsibility, and trying to understand individuality." (Waking Life)

Critique is the avenue through which movements in thought and shifts in power manifest. It is both a practice and a mindset that makes available possible alternatives to that which already exists. If no one had ever stood up and said, "Wait, let's try some other way," then the world as we know it today would likely be much different. By the end of this discourse, one may even wonder whether or not a world without critique could even exist.

For late philosopher Michel Foucault, critique is an essential component of individual freedom and politics of self. It is a means of maintaining mobility of mind and spirit; of avoiding a fixed, stabilized view of the ever-changing present; of maintaining a critical awareness of oneself and the place and time in which one resides. While critique does not declare truth, it instead analyzes what Foucault calls various "discourses of truth". It helps make available one's ability to exert freedom in a civilization dictated by forces of power.

Foucault's major work revolves around formation of self with regard to the relationship between three major and inherently connected forces: power, truth and subjectivity. Each of these has a unique relationship with the other, and the three forces in tandem have immense impact on the formation of the individual being. According to his theory, critique is one avenue through which one may alter these relationships, and therefore alter what one may deem the "politics of self". To quote Foucault:

> But above all, one sees that the focus of critique is essentially the cluster of relations that bind the one to the other, or the one to the two others, power, truth and the subject. And if governmentalization is really this movement concerned with subjugating individuals in the very reality of a social practice by mechanisms of power that appeal to a truth, I will say that critique is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth. Critique will be the art of voluntary inservitude, of reflective indocility. ("What is Critique?", 386)

The "art of voluntary inservitude" and "reflective indocility" require one to cultivate a certain critical awareness of oneself and one's surroundings. Critique is a matter of examining the status quo and maintaining the freedom to question it. For Foucault, this freedom manifests and perpetuates itself through the ancient practice called care of the self. Foucault often turns to the ancient Greeks in his work, and this concept remains a central theme in his analysis of the individual as subject to various power dynamics. Care of the self constitutes lifelong work on one's body, mind, and soul, in order to better relate to other people and live an ethically-driven life.

Foucault, in his analysis of modes of power and care of the self, condones a full immersion into the present. In an age of mass consumerism and globalization, technological innovation and ecological consciousness, what constitutes individual identity has shifted, and discourses of power and truth have taken on new meaning. My wish here is to facilitate a discourse between the work of Michel Foucault and the twenty-first century Western world. Using his theories on power, truth and the subject, I would like to look at these topics in the context of our twenty-first century American society, and how care of the self may still prove relevant to our increasingly externalized lives. Most importantly, I will explore how care of the self may still constitute a valid freedom-preserving practice in our ever-changing world.

Before I continue on, I would like to clarify the context that this discourse will follow. In many academic studies, the term "society" often gets thrown around, especially in discourses of

philosophy or social science. In this discussion, I'd like to avoid referring to "society" as some convoluted, abstract monster looming over the reader's head. Instead, for the sake of this particular discourse, when I refer to "society", I refer to everything that constitutes the present – material, ideological, or otherwise. This includes every individual, law and institution, and the manner in which each of these interacts with one another. It includes the discourses we currently perceive as true, as well as those we deem false or obsolete. Due to my isolation as an American college student living in a globally and technologically driven era, I can only speak for the research I have done and the related observations I have made. I have tried to avoid making any brash generalizations, particularly about topics that I have not studied. That said, I contribute my societal critique, not as a pseudo-expert on politics and social constructs, but as a scholar curious to test Foucault's theories against the changes that Western society has experienced since his death in 1984.

II . What is Care of the Self?

"Those of antiquity who wished that all people throughout the empire would let their inborn luminous virtue shine forth put governing their states well first; wishing to govern their states well, they first established harmony in their households; wishing to establish harmony in their households, their first cultivated themselves…" (Confucious, The Great Learning)

According to Michel Foucault, care of the self first and foremost constitutes creation and governmentation of self. It requires a continuous practice of introspection that simultaneously allows for a realistic sense of one's own surroundings. One could argue that this is the only constant element of the practice known as care of the self; while it is vital to introduce oneself to new activities, ideas and challenges throughout life, that sense of both internal and external awareness must always remain intact. According to Foucault:

> In the Platonic current of thought…the problem for the subject or the individual soul is to turn its gaze upon itself, to recognize itself in what it is and, recognizing itself in what it is, to recall the truths that issue from it and that it has been able to contemplate. ("The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 29)

For many, looking on the inside may be time-consuming, difficult or even painful. When there is so much to take in from the outside, it almost seems counterintuitive to think from the inside out. In our technology-based world, there are more than enough distractions to keep us from thinking about ourselves. A quiet moment of reflection fades fast when the phone begins to ring, or perhaps causes us to feel guilty that we aren't focused on something "more productive". For Foucault and the ancient Greeks, it was counterproductive *not* to focus on the self, and a keen self-awareness was vital for participation in social and political life. Care of the self, then, became a focal point for individual freedom, positive relationships with others, and, potentially, ethical participation in politics.

Ethos*: The Path to Freedom*

In order to know ourselves, we must first understand what constitutes caring for ourselves. It is both a mindset and a practice, constant throughout one's life, in which the individual takes charge of his own identity and sense of self. This self-care occurs at the bodily, mental and spiritual level. When Foucault spoke of spirituality, he in no way referred deities or religions. Instead, one's "spirit" or "soul" refers to an ethical, cosmic sense of self, as it appears in the *Oxford American Dictionary*. Care of the self, for soul, mind and body, is much more complex than eating healthy and avoiding stress, as Foucault explains:

> It is a matter of acts and pleasures, not of desire. It is a matter of the formation of the self through techniques of living, not of repression through prohibition and law ("Subjectivity and Truth", 89).

Rather than identify oneself according to manmade limitations, Foucault suggests that we instead form our own unique individuality by way of our own experience and ethical code. Many times, we tend to mistake social order for natural order, as expert J. Stephen Lansing describes: "The natural order of the cosmos exists independently of human actions, though they may threaten it, whereas the social order forms a whole that exists because of a complete set of exclusively human acts" (376). If we look beyond social and judicial constraints and see ourselves in relation to the cosmos, the perspective tends to change. In terms of smallness in the universe and the limits of mortality, the often obscured reality remains that every human on this Earth is equal. We will all die eventually, as will our Earth, and no individual is exempt from it. Recognizing this limitation and questioning one's socially-formed limitations are the first steps toward building what the Greeks called an *ethos*. One's *ethos*, and its continuous improvement, has essential permanence in one's practice of care for the self. Foucault elaborates on the importance of this mindset:

> For the Greeks, [*ethos*] was the concrete form of freedom; this was the way they problematized their freedom. A man possessed of a splendid *ethos*, who could be admired and put forth as an example, was someone who practiced freedom in a certain way…Extensive work by the self on the self is required for this practice of freedom to take shape in an *ethos* that is good, beautiful, honorable estimable, memorable and exemplary. ("The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom", 29)

In modern terms, *ethos* translates quite obviously to ethics, one's personal philosophy of morals and values. For the Greeks, one's *ethos* was the means by which individuals relate to themselves and others. Similarly, it was a means of opposing and preventing absolute and oppressive power, a major concern for many ancient Greek thinkers. According to Foucault, power exists everywhere, in every human relationship. Foucault's more pessimistic critics fear that power's ubiquity makes it inescapable, and that we are perpetually at odds with oppression – physically,

mentally and spiritually. In some ways, Foucault would argue that this is absolutely true. The individual, oppressed or not, and conscious of it or not, always participates in what Foucault calls "power relations". For Foucault, power relations exist when all parties involved have certain degrees of both individual freedom and power over the others. When an individual loses his freedom in this power relation, then Foucault calls this a "state of domination." In this light, practicing care of the self allows one to adjust and control power over both oneself and others.

Askesis: *The Path to Ethos*

Askesis may be thought of in the manner of the physical manifestation or practice of one's ethos. In the ancient schools of thought, *askesis* consisted of training for the mind, body and soul. Many of their texts, according to Foucault's analysis, suggested a strong general awareness of the power relations that underlie each relationship, as well as a fear of enslaving oneself to the unjust desires of oneself or others. In "Technologies of Self", Foucault speculates:

> What are the principal features of *askesis*? They include exercises in which the subject puts himself in a situation in which he can verify whether he can confront events and use the discourses with which he is armed. It is a question of testing the preparation. Is this truth assimilated enough to become ethics so that we can behave as we must when an event presents itself (239)?

Truth can be a rather elusive problem. While forever bombarded with individuals and groups professing various discourses as truth, the responsibility remains within individuals to determine their own relationship with these truths. The "preparation" Foucault mentions has to do with positioning oneself toward analyses of these truths in terms of one's relationship to oneself.

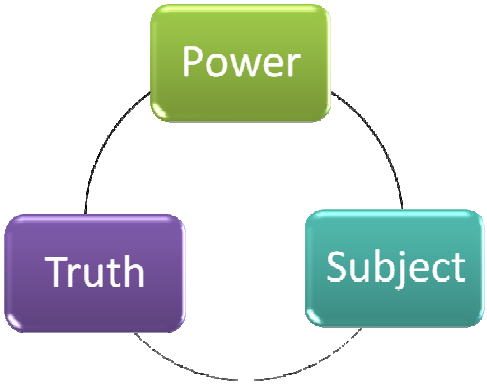
A lifelong cultivation of self consisted of ethical practices allows one to alter one's relationship with these truths. Foucault proposes activities such as meditation and self-writing, practices that bring oneself inside oneself, and momentarily outside of one's relationship with the world. He also mentions practices of self-deprivation, such as fasting, that help individuals teach

themselves about their own needs, and discipline themselves from that which is unnecessary or perhaps unjust. Most importantly, however, all of these practices help one to explore one's sense of freedom by maintaining the ability to choose where to fit oneself within society.

III. Power, Truth and Subjectivity

"You don't need no reason or a three piece suit to argue the truth." (Brett Dennen)

Power, truth, and subjectivity each have a complex, integral relationship with one another. Institutions gain power over individuals by way of subjecting them to discourses of truth, and these discourses become truth by way of the institution's ability to gain enough power to establish a notion of normativity within the larger macrocosm of society. Consider, if you will, the visual below:



We will later explore normativity as an effect of the dynamic illustrated above. For now, we will explore the modes of thinking and living that have had sometimes subtle, yet powerful effects on individuals and the manner in which individuals identify themselves within the larger power structure that surrounds them.

What is Pastoral Power?

Although his focus remains grounded in the present, Foucault often turns to the ancient Greek and Roman cultures for their philosophies on self-identity and growth. For the ancient Greeks, the ethical bonding of selves was made possible by a distinct relationship between two philosophical credos: *gn□thi seauton* ("know yourself") and *epimeleisthai sautou* ("take care of yourself"). In many ancient schools of thought, it was generally accepted that the latter initiated the former. As one continuously practiced care of the self throughout life, self-knowledge and self-understanding would follow, and shift in tune to the rhythm of new experience and discovery.

When Christianity and its ethical canon took hold of the Western world, this mentality shifted. For Foucault, this shift in religious belief also marked a change in focus on individual identity, and therefore a change in how individuals related to themselves and others:

> There are several reasons why "know yourself" has obscured "take care of yourself." First, there has been a profound transformation in the moral principles of Western society. We find it difficult to base rigorous morality and austere principles on the precept that we should give more care to ourselves than to anything else in the world. We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules. We inherit the tradition of Christian morality which makes self-renunciation the condition for salvation. To know oneself was, paradoxically, a means of self-renunciation. ("Technologies of the Self", 228)

Foucault presents us with a critique of the shift from the ancient schools of thought to the Christian schools of thought, and the obscure yet powerful effects it had on the conception of the individual. Where the individual in the ancient schools of thought sought self-cultivation as a means of maintaining freedom, the individual in the Christian school of thought sought self-discovery as a means of obtaining salvation in the next life. For Foucault and many other modern philosophers, it is this focus on the afterlife, rather than the present, that has had drastic effect on how the individual relates to the self and society.

What is Subjectivity?

Where, then, may freedom play into this constant flux of power relations? Foucault sees care of the self as being an essential component of individual freedom. Once again, self-awareness and consciousness of one's surroundings plays a key role. In order to maintain freedom from states of domination, whether internal or external, an individual must first explore how he fits into these power relations and how he may change that relationship. Foucault clarifies this concept in his essay "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom":

> ...The risk of dominating others and exercising a tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has not taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city… if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others. (31)

When one gains enough power over another so as to invade his sense of self and identity, Foucault calls this the condition of subjectivity. In his study of subjectivity, Foucault is not interested in how one individual exerts power over another, but how societal institutions exert power over individuals. An individual becomes subject to these institutions when the institution dominates some aspect of the individual's identity. Lakshman Yapa offers the perspective by which we will define institutions in this discourse:

> Institutions and their discursive practices are the agents by which [subjects] are divided, classified, and subjected to normalization. Consider the categories of normal versus mad, normal versus criminal, normal versus pervert, normal versus poor, modern versus traditional, and developed versus underdeveloped. They are the products of specialized discourses that determine the shape, form and constitution of [subjects]. (712)

To look at it another way, individuals become subject to those institutions for which they must sacrifice some element of their identity and their freedom. All people experience some form of

subjectivity in their lives, and one may even argue that subjectivity is necessary for many functions in our present society.

Consider the scenario of an interviewer and a potential candidate for a corporate job in our modern American society. Here we have multiple power relations occurring all at once – the interviewer and the interviewee, the interviewer and the company, the interviewee and the company, etc. The freedom for the interviewer to hire an employee depends on the degree of freedom the company has allowed him, and he is therefore subject to the company's hiring standards and policies. In order to gain employment, the interviewee must first show that he suits the standards of the company and the position for which he applied. He must divulge certain information about himself in order to be considered a viable candidate in the first place. Procedures often used by employers, such as drug tests, background checks and credit score reports, verify whether or not the candidate meets the standards for employment. While they may have little or nothing to do with the candidate's performance as an employee, if the candidate cannot pass these tests, it is likely that he will not get the job. The candidate thus becomes subject to the legal and company policies set in place by their respective institutions; his information, such as his credit score or criminal history, becomes available to these institutions whether or not he desires to divulge it. Here we reach what Foucault might call a problematization of the relationship between institutional and individual power. On the one hand, a company's need to seek information about individuals protects employers from hiring a potentially unfit employee. The more obscure question, however, is how the need to confess certain information about oneself affects an individual's sense of identity. In other words, we must explore how these institutions gain power over individuals by way of their claim to know the truth about them.

Discourses of Truth

Throughout history, humanity has developed many schools of thought in an attempt to understand individuals and how they function within their societies. Each of the sciences as we know them today has bred its own languages (or discourses) and technologies as means of discovering truth. We engage in discourses of truth that explore the problems of our relationships to the earth, other people, and ourselves. The study of physics, for example, grounds us in acceptance of natural physical laws that dictate how objects relate to the space around them. Biology helps us to understand our own bodies, as well as the bodies of the other living beings with whom we share this earth, and so on. Each of these disciplines has its own method and terminology for discovering truth about the laws of the physical world.

These "hard sciences", however, leave many questions unanswered, and often trigger other, more problematic questions about our own existence. The discourses and empirical methods used by these scientists have not developed means for finding concrete laws of human nature or individuality. While the mysteries of the material world have well-defined methods for being solved, many of the "hows" and "whys" of human life remain rather obscure. There exists no science discerning the laws of power, freedom, or differences in individuality – only theories. Philosophy and religion attempt to tackle those questions for which we have no means to answer empirically. Yet, after thousands upon thousands of years of philosophical and religious research, thousands of books, pamphlets, letters, and lectures, thousands of lives lost, we are no closer to definitive answers than we were thousands of years ago. In many ways, these theologians and theorists, in expressing their doctrines as truth, may have problematized these issues even more.

More recently, social sciences have taken the place of philosophy and religion in attempting to explore truths about human societies. Psychologists look to bridge the complicated gap between biology and behavior, economists study fluctuations in an ever-globalizing market, and political scientists examine dynamics of government, all with the hopes of improving upon our knowledge of this complex, multifarious phenomenon known as humanity. In a study on the fundamental causes of worldwide poverty, geographer Lakshman Yapa offers a postmodernist perspective on how we gain and use knowledge. While Foucault rejects "postmodernist" and other labels, I find that Yapa's statement harmonizes with our present discourse:

> Postmodernism as epistemology argues that social science cannot serve as a 'mirror of society.' Knowledge arises out of embodiment in society; it always has and always will. Social science and society bear a codependent and necessary symbiotic relationship to each other (708).

This is not to say that the social sciences are entirely wrong about us, or that psychologists and economists should begin filling out unemployment forms. Rather, it is to say that social and self understanding should always be fluid, evolving, and subject to change at any given moment. Consider again Foucault's earlier discussion of critique and its necessity for discerning truth. As different elements of the world change, both in nature and society, so do the questions and answers that social scientists study. Where one school of thought claims to have the universal answer to any given problem, it would make sense for another to question the limits of that solution and explore its possible alternatives.

This epistemological problem was of major interest to Foucault. He used various discourses to analyze and critique the ontological problem of the present. For him, the answers do not lie within knowing the singularities of these disciplines, but rather to understand how these disciplines function in bridging the gap between the individual and the world. He opposed applying the discourse of social sciences to social, political and economic issues, and instead

initiated his own discourse on power, truth and the individual in conversation with these issues. In doing so, he practiced critique as a means of maintaining freedom from domination by those institutions that claim to know the truth about individuals.

IV. Musings on Normativity

MUCH madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.
'T is the majority

In this, as all, prevails.
Assent, and you are sane;
Demur,—you 're straightway dangerous,
And handled with a chain.
(Emily Dickinson)

When certain concepts or rules take effect on the general population, it is often the institution using its own discourse of truth to set standards and boundaries for individuals. By doing so, these institutions tend to exclude those that do not fit into their sense of what is "normal" or expected, a group of people Foucault would call "the other". The judicial system, for example, enacts laws that distinguish law-abiding citizens from criminals. Psychologists diagnose clients with various mental disorders, thereby distinguishing the sane from the insane. Each of these labels, while useful to institutions, have powerful and sometimes tragic effects on individual identity.

In his early work, Foucault explores the concept of the "other" as subject to dynamics of normativity. Foucault's critique lies in how these concepts of normativity are formed. Foucault offers an example of how normativity is enforced in his essay "The Abnormals":

> "Interdiction" constituted the judicial measure by which an individual was at least partially disqualified as a legal subject. This juridical and negative frame will be partly

> filled, partly replaced by a set of techniques and methods by which the authorities will undertake to train those who resist training and correct the incorrigibles. The "confinement" that was practiced on a wide scale starting in the seventeenth century may appear as a kind of intermediate formula between the negative juridical interdiction and the positive methods of rectification. Confinement does in fact exclude, and it functions outside the laws, but as justification it exerts the need to correct, to improve, to lead to repentance, to restore to "better feelings." (52-53)

Because it is the sane who define insanity, the lawmakers who define lawlessness, the discourses made by these institutions fail to constitute a universal sense of normativity. By generalizing what constitutes the "abnormal" (in whatever context), the system or institution that creates it leaves little room for situational differences. What may be forgotten or overlooked in these cases are the potential mistakes of the individuals making decisions on behalf of the institution, or flaws within the structure of the institutions themselves. These institutions, such as the court systems, make decisions based on their *own* standards of normativity, which may conflict with many individual cases.

Once the individual has been established as the other by one institution, this often affects his relationship with the other institutions in his society. Many people who have a criminal history, for example, may face difficulty finding employment or housing. An individual with a poor credit score will have difficulty making any major transactions that require a credit check, such as buying a car or starting a cellular phone plan. Foucault himself, in a video debate with linguist Noam Chomsky, discusses how the educational institutions in Europe and the United States inherently exclude people from certain socioeconomic groups. While it would make sense for schools to choose their students based on merit, much of the school enrollment process depends on how much money the individual or family can spend on education. If the individual or family cannot pay for school, then the individual is excluded from the benefits of what is

considered by society to be "good education", and therefore immediately excluded from gaining certain types of employment.

Why or *how* the person violates these rules of normativity does not matter to the employer or college dean; the sheer fact that the individual. Normativity, although it eventually becomes part of the cause for subjectivity, is first and foremost an *effect* of power relations between institutions and individuals.

It may be one thing to protect the masses from violent or disruptive behavior – many would argue that this is why we have laws, law enforcement, and other related institutions. To what degree, however, are these institutions creating the same problems they were formed to prevent? When a man is continually told by judges or psychiatrists that he is unfit for society, that he cannot be anything more than a societal delinquent, how else is he to self-identify? Foucault's philosophy of normativity invites us to ask these questions, and he urges us to look beyond individual flaws as a means of exploring how people are excluded from society by way of their own subjectivity. Consider his statement from the video debate with Noam Chomsky:

> It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to [critique] the workings of institutions that appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize and attack them in such a manner that political violence has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.

Here is where politics meets philosophy; where the individual practice of care of the self becomes vital to political participation. It is exactly these notions of normativity that must always remain under the scrutiny of critique; if not to revolutionize that notion and the institution that fashioned it, then to experiment with the limits of these regulations so as to maintain the possibility of preventing us from enslaving ourselves to them.

V. Who is the Outsider?

"I knew all of the rules, but the rules did not know me – guaranteed." (Eddie Vedder, "Guaranteed")

The outsider is one who -within the chaotic web of power, subjectivity and discourse disguised as truth – can emerge and reflect without limits. He removes himself, if only briefly, from thoughts of his bank account, boss and taxes, strips all social labels and roles from his being, and yet maintains a sense of self and a critical awareness about the world. He removes all essences of society from his identity, with or without having to remove himself from society. Author Virginia Woolf conceptualizes the outsider in her ethical critique of 1930s Great Britain titled *Three Guineas*:

> Broadly speaking, the main distinction between us who are outside society and you who are inside society must be that whereas you will make use of the means provided by your position – leagues, conferences, campaigns, great names, and all such public measures as your wealth and political influence place within your reach – we, remaining outside, will experiment not with public means in public but with private means in private. Those experiments will not merely be critical but creative (134).

One of the most famous and perhaps zealous examples of an outsider is writer and thinker Henry David Thoreau. His nonfiction novel *Walden* is a canon of historical American writing. A treatise on his life alone in the woods of Walden Pond in Massachusetts, the piece also serves as the story of Thoreau's life as an outsider. Here he retells his refusal to submit to paying taxes, and the consequences that followed:

> One afternoon, near the end of the first summer, when I went to the village to get a shoe from the cobbler's, I was seized and put into jail, because, as I have elsewhere related, I did not pay a tax to, or recognize the authority of, the state which buys and sells men, women and children, like cattle, at the door of its senate-house. I had gone down to the woods for other purposes. But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society. It is true, I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might

> have run 'amok' against society; but I preferred that society should run 'amok' against me, it being the desperate party (*Walden*, 183).

To this day, most Americans still struggle with the same burdens as they did in Thoreau's day – namely, money. Many people base their perspective of personal success on their relationship with money, such as the relief of paying off a debt or the triumph of earning a raise. For Thoreau, paying taxes has little to do with his sense of morality or self, and its consequences only give him more material with which to critique, as we see in his infamous essay "Civil Disobedience". In both of these works, Thoreau rejects viewing the "state" as any kind of respectable or authoritative figure, to the degree that he is willing to spend time in jail to prove so. By in separating himself from community, state and society itself, and despite momentary incarceration, Thoreau asserts himself in his writing as a free and ethical individual.

One needn't build a criminal record to practice freedom. Thoreau's reflection on his world as an outsider looking in also acts as a memoir for the development of his own personal *ethos*. He critiques the ways in which individuals interact with one another, not to urge them to change their ways, but to question whether or not these are true connections with others, or if social norms have got them stuck in routine. In this particular passage, as he critiques social interaction, he simultaneously critiques his own voluntary solitude. The paradox he creates here suggests that, while he rejects the rules and constructs created by other people around him, that it is still crucial to connect and interact with other people.

> With thinking we may be beside ourselves in a sane sense. By a conscious effort of the mind we can stand aloof from actions and their consequences; and all things, good and bad, go by us like a torrent. We are not wholly involved in nature. I may be either the driftwood in the stream, or Indra in the sky looking down on it. I *may* be affected by a theatrical exhibition; on the other hand, I *may not* be affected by an actual event which appears to concern me much more. I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of

> me, but spectator, sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you. When the play, it may be the tragedy, of life is over, the spectator goes his way. It was a kind of fiction, a work of the imagination only, so far as he was concerned. This doubleness may easily make us poor neighbours and friends sometimes (144).

The "doubleness" Thoreau refers to can reflect the different selves we express and experience under different conditions. This phenomenon can be as simple as the difference between how we speak to an authority figure versus a friend, or as intricate as our own personal relations between internal and external selves. As Thoreau illustrates, this removal of self from self can be precarious at times, as it may also cause one to remove oneself from surrounding people and events. Having to juggle multiple selves for the sake of outside observers, for example, may limit or inhibit the more fulfilling relationships one could have with other individuals.

In this confusion of selves, Foucault would interject with the necessity for the practice of care of the self as a means of maintaining a stable sense of self. Here is where care of the self may not only act as an ethical solution, but also a therapeutic one. The previously mentioned techniques of self could easily help an individual to regain possession of one's own identity. Meditation and journal-writing have shown in countless settings to be helpful in times of stress and trauma, even thousands of years after the practice first evolved. While these practices may be ancient, many modern folk would argue it is certainly not irrelevant.

VI. A Critical, Ethical Reflection

> *"Now I'm convinced the whole day long, that all I've learned is always wrong, and things are true that I forget, but no one taught that to me yet." (Phish, "Character Zero")*

Language is, at one and the same time, limiting and liberating. Words, more specifically how we use them, bear a great invisible weight upon us, a weight that can be overwhelming and perhaps elusive at times. We conceptualize and modify our world, yet simultaneously confound it, with language. We isolate ourselves within the confines of our own spoken tongues, attempting to mold notions of truth with restricted lexicons. As a scholar of my own mother tongue, I specialize in exploring the subtleties of the written word. I have been exposed to Michel Foucault's (translated) work throughout my college career, yet I still find myself craving further exploration, even as my undergraduate academic career comes to a close and graduation day looms ever closer.

This attitude and this yearning was the driving force behind the conceptualization of the discourse I present to you. I'd read much of Foucault's work in multiple courses and under multiple lights, yet I wanted to learn more and fill my own comprehensive gaps that were perhaps left unaddressed in my courses of study. I hadn't quite yet grasped the concept of subjectivity as it relates to power and discourses of truth, and I only had a vague understanding of his discussion on care of the self. Foucault's frequent return to the ancient schools of thought made it difficult for me to apply these concepts to my own present day, so I set out to fashion my own understanding of Foucault's theories in the context of the time and place in which I live. More importantly, I focused my interest on the individual, and how individuals relate to themselves and the complex social and political world around them. One of the more difficult parts of this project was finally over – I'd picked a topic for my senior project. Now, what to read, what to write?

I flipped feverishly through my volumes of Foucault's collected essays, finding that any and all of them could have had potential value in my work. Some of them I'd already read in

other classes, yet too hurriedly for me to digest them properly. Others were new to me, and built masterfully upon my foundational understanding of his work. I chose those essays that focused on care of the self and subjectivity specifically, so that I may dissect the critical foundations of his works and provide a clear analysis of my own.

Many have asked, and you may also – what is my fascination with Foucault in particular? I find crucial his concept of discourse, which is fundamentally the language of any given topic, and marvel at his ability to shape his own discourse in critique of the countless discourses that present themselves as truth to us. I believe his theories provide a timeless critical framework with which to analyze and critique how individuals relate to themselves and the society in which they live, specifically in the less frequently discussed contexts of power and truth. While I realize that these concepts may not fit consistently with all individuals and all societies, I composed this discourse with the understanding that language as I know it limits me from dealing in universals. I present you with Foucault's work as I understand it, and as I apply it to my own observations of the world around me. What readers choose to do with my words is entirely up to them, as with any discourse they contact.

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