



Foucault on History and the Self

Réal Fillion

Volume 54, numéro 1, février 1998

Éthique et corps souffrant

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/401139ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/401139ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Fillion, R. (1998). Foucault on History and the Self. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 54(1), 143–162. <https://doi.org/10.7202/401139ar>

FOUCAULT ON HISTORY AND THE SELF

Réal Fillion

Department of philosophy
University of Moncton

RÉSUMÉ : *Les derniers ouvrages de Michel Foucault nous aident à comprendre comment l'histoire, telle qu'il la pratiquait, conduit à une forme de connaissance de soi critique qui promet une certaine liberté. On discute ici des deux derniers volumes de son Histoire de la sexualité du point de vue de sa philosophie de l'histoire.*

ABSTRACT : *Michel Foucault's last works help us to understand how history, as practised by him, leads to a form of critical self-knowledge that promises a certain freedom. The last two volumes of his History of Sexuality are discussed here in terms of his philosophy of history.*

I. FOUCAULT AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Although the change of tone and subject-matter of Michel Foucault's last two volumes of his *History of Sexuality*¹ has caused much discussion and reconsideration of his work as a whole,² what has been little discussed is the way these works shed light on Foucault's conception of the relation between ourselves and history, and between the past and the present. More specifically, I would like to argue in this paper that these last works help us understand how history, as practised by Michel Foucault, leads to a form of critical self-knowledge that promises a certain freedom. In other words, I would like to discuss these last works in terms of Foucault's philosophy of *history*.

It is important to try and understand Foucault's work as a philosophy of history, not only to forestall a persistent but misguided criticism, but also to enable us to evaluate the true significance of his contribution both to history and philosophy. The

1. Michel FOUCAULT, *Histoire de la sexualité*, t. 2, *L'Usage des plaisirs*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984 (*The Use of Pleasure*, translated by R. Hurley, New York, Pantheon, 1985). Hereafter, referred to as UP; and ID., *Histoire de la sexualité*, t. 3, *Le Souci de soi*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984 (*The Care of the Self*, translated by R. Hurley, New York, Pantheon, 1986). Hereafter referred to as CS.

2. The debate is often characterized in terms of whether or not there is a "return of the subject" in these works. What is meant by the phrase is whether or not Foucault is finally recognizing that, in order for his analysis to be effective, he cannot rid himself of the concept of a grounding subjectivity, in the Kantian sense of a condition for the possibility of experience. Cf. Luc FERRY and Alain RENAULT, *La Pensée 68 : Essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 178-195; and more recently, Alain TOURAINE, *Critique de la modernité*, Paris, Fayard, 1992, p. 193ff.

most general and widespread criticism of Foucault is that his work, although clearly evaluative in its unmasking of incipient forms of modern power (or so the story goes) does not in itself provide the normative framework that would justify and ground such evaluations. Indeed, not only do we encounter this objection in critics like Taylor, Habermas, Merquior, Grumley, Dews,³ but also in such sympathetic readers as Dreyfus and Rabinow. On the last page of their important study on Foucault, they write :

It might seem that if Foucault wants to give up one set of dangers for another, he owes us a criterion of what makes one kind of danger more dangerous than another. Foucault is clear that he cannot justify his preference for some dangers over others by an appeal to human nature, our tradition, or universal reason. His silence on this matter, while consistent, is nonetheless a source of conclusion.⁴

However, the confusion here does not stem from Foucault's work as such, but from certain assumptions about the function of philosophy. To say that Foucault "owes us" criteria and must "justify" his preferences presupposes a view of philosophical activity as precisely that : the formulation and articulation of criteria and justifications for evaluating between "good" and "bad" and "true" and "false." Clearly, Foucault, insofar as he wishes to continue Nietzsche's project, rejects such a view of philosophy ; but, more importantly, he rejects it in terms of and by means of his historiographical practice. His well-known rejection of any teleological, subject-centered conception of history is not only (and I would argue not primarily) a theoretical challenge to a particular philosophical tradition (stemming from German Idealism), but, more significantly, it is a practical challenge to the predominant way in which philosophers and historians of ideas conceive and practice history. By doing this, Foucault is virtually alone amongst contemporary philosophers of history in following through on his rejection of speculative philosophy of history (à la Kant and Hegel) by *not* attempting a theoretical justification of those criteria of significance that would render history intelligible ; but, rather, like the new historians (who also from a backdrop to his work),⁵ he seeks to explore and articulate the actual operation of various criteria of significance and selection already hard at work in the variety of processes that configure both the past and the present. (Criteria especially evident — or made so with the help of Foucault's analyses — in our prisons, asylums, and ambiguous attitudes towards sex.)

-
3. Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, translated by F.G. Lawrence, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1987 ; Charles TAYLOR, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in *Philosophy and The Human Sciences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (coll. "Philosophical Papers," 2), 1985 ; José G. MERQUIOR, *Foucault*, London, Fontana, 1985 ; John E. GRUMLEY, *History and Totality : Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault*, London, Routledge, 1989 ; Peter DEWS, *Logics of Disintegration : Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London, New York, Verso, 1987.
 4. Hubert L. DREYFUS, Paul RABINOW, *Michel Foucault : Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983², p. 264.
 5. The historian Paul VEYNE (admittedly Foucault's friend) writes : "Foucault, c'est l'historien achevé, l'achèvement de l'histoire" ("Foucault révolutionne l'histoire," in *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, Paris, Seuil, 1978, p. 203) ; and perhaps a little less dramatically, Jacques LE GOFF, another important French historian has this to say of Foucault whom he regards as "un grand intellectuel contemporain qui est à la fois un grand historien et un grand philosophe et a joué un rôle de premier plan dans le renouvellement de l'histoire [...]" (*Histoire et Mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1988, p. 258).

In addition — and this is the concern of this paper — Foucault draws out the philosophical implications of such a practice (and concomitant conception) of history. If criteria of significance, indeed of intelligibility itself, are historically constituted, and if history itself is best described in terms of a variety of different processes whose configurations depend on the questions they allow to be asked, then the picture of history as a process of ever-increasing rationality or increased self-consciousness (presupposed by the demand for criteria of significance) cannot remain unquestionable or unquestioned. Indeed, even the rather innocuous idea that more historical knowledge can only lead to better self-awareness becomes problematic when history becomes a question of the various *knowledges* that have been produced, the kinds of awareness they promote, right down to the very selves that are thereby constituted.

Which brings us to the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. What I would like to do through an examination of these two texts is to show how the ultimate function of Foucault's historical analysis is to provide us with a critical self-knowledge (of ourselves and the present) that I call *self-wariness* (as opposed to self-awareness, the principal concern of traditional philosophy of history). Rather than a substantive self-knowledge, his type of historical analysis can be seen as providing a critical self-knowledge, a knowledge that can show the different ways our "selves" may be constituted and constructed. As Foucault has said: "Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated, but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what's going on now — and to change it."⁶

Thus, this idea of self-wariness leads not only to a critical self-knowledge but also to action, not by prescribing any particular course, but by pointing out *possibilities*. Here, too, Foucault's understanding of history challenges the more traditional conception that sees its task as that of discerning the *necessary* conditions of that which it investigates. The problem with this approach is that that which is investigated must already be defined and in some sense complete. However, as Foucault as well as the new historians have shown, there is nothing in history that can serve as such a non-contingent object of investigation (everything is open to re-interpretation and therefore is not complete); therefore, rather than seek necessary conditions, Foucault's histories spell out conditions of *possibility*. And by pointing out the possibility of various configurations, one thereby implies the possibility of *other* possibilities; and it is in these possibilities that a modest but very real sense of freedom can be found and practiced. Or so I claim a close reading of Foucault reveals.

II. DE-FAMILIARIZING THE PRESENT

Why, in his last works, did Foucault turn to Antiquity? This is the question that most commentators ask when confronted with the last two volumes of the *History of*

6. H.L. DREYFUS, P. RABINOW, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

Sexuality.⁷ Foucault had occasion to respond to this question in various interviews,⁸ but perhaps the most pertinent response for our purposes is to be found in *The Use of Pleasure* where he writes :

After all, what would be the value for the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield from himself ? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (UP, 8).

This is an important statement ; indeed, in a sense, it provides a key to understanding this "turning" to the Greek experience of ethics. The point to note is that it is the *experience of ethics* that is of interest to Foucault and not principally the fact that it is of Greek and Roman origin.⁹ In fact, then, objections such as that put forward by Daraki that Foucault misrepresents the Greeks,¹⁰ or again that he overestimates the value of Greek "freedom,"¹¹ or even yet that he undervalues a potential Greek "feminism"¹² within that experience of ethics, are in some sense beside the point. And they are beside the point because they misunderstand the particular use Foucault is making of *history*. He does not turn to ancient history in order to find a pre-modern normative foundation. Indeed, as we saw above, he does not see the philosophical use of history to be one of establishing criteria and justifying norms. Foucault understands philosophy as an *activity* and not as the elaboration of a doctrine or theoretical construct. This is the reason why his philosophical questions have consistently been connected to historical research ; that is, his histories do not merely serve as illustrations of his "theory." As he himself puts it :

There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it (UP, 9).

7. This is specially true in France. Aside from the works mentioned above, see also Mario VEGETTI, "Foucault et les anciens," *Critique*, 471-472 (août-septembre 1986), p. 925-932 ; Maria DARAKI, "Le voyage en Grèce de Michel Foucault," *Esprit*, 100 (avril 1985), p. 55-83 ; Henri JOLY, "Retour aux Grecs : réflexions sur les 'pratiques de soi' dans *L'Usage des plaisirs*," *Le Débat*, 41 (septembre-novembre 1986), p. 100-120.

8. Probably the most cited is the interview conducted by Dreyfus and Rabinow published as an Afterword to their work on Foucault and entitled "On the Genealogy of Ethics". Cf. also "An Aesthetics of Existence," "The Return of Morality" and "The Concern for Truth," all interviews reprinted in Michel FOUCAULT, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture : Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, New York, Routledge, 1988 ; as well as "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Bernauer and Rasmussen, ed., *The Final Foucault*, Boston, MIT Press, 1988, p. 1-20.

9. Of course, the choice is not arbitrary either. The point is that it provides an important *perspective* on our contemporary experience of ethics. As he explains in "The Return to Morality : " "Trying to rethink the Greeks today does not consist in setting off Greek morality as the domain of morality par excellence which one would need for self-reflection. The point is rather to see to it that European thinking can take up Greek thinking again as an experience which took place once and with regard to which one can be completely free" (p. 249).

10. M. DARAKI, *art. cit.*, p. 72.

11. M. VEGETTI, *art. cit.*, p. 928.

12. H. JOLY, *art. cit.*, p. 113.

Thus the appeal to history ; it takes us away from our all-too-familiar world ; as well as providing a perspective on that world. He insists, however, that although he is clearly "doing" history in these works, they are not to be considered the works of an "historian," by which he means that their primary task is not to tell us something about the past, although they remain keen to the latest historiographical developments.¹³ In other words, these works are clearly works of historical research but they are presented philosophically, from philosophical motives. Foucault calls them a philosophical exercise whose "object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" (UP, 9).

While this may help us understand why Foucault consistently attaches his philosophical questions to historical ones, it still does not tell us why Foucault now chose the Greeks and Romans. Is Foucault — a professor at the College de France for some time now — simply paying his dues and returning to the canon ? Foucault, whose work until then had consistently restricted itself to a certain periodisation of history (Renaissance, Classical Age, Modern Age), insists that by distancing himself from this periodisation he was able to get a better perspective on what he had consistently been trying to do (which he now characterizes as a "history of truth"), that is : "analyzing, not behaviors, or ideas, nor societies and their 'ideologies,' but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought — and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed" (UP, 11). This analysis of *problematizations* is what Foucault means by *genealogy*, or what he also characterizes as 'historical ontology,'¹⁴ and it is important to remember that genealogy, for Foucault, "means that I begin my analysis from a question posed in the present."¹⁵ He writes :

[...] in raising this very general question, and in directing it to Greek and Greco-Roman culture, it occurred to me that this problematization was linked to a group of practices that have been of unquestionable importance in our societies : I am referring to what can be called the "arts of existence." What I mean by the phrase are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *œuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. These "arts of existence," these "techniques of the self," no doubt lost some of their importance and autonomy when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity, and later, into educative, medical, and psychological types of practices. Still, I thought that the long history of these aesthetics of existence and these technologies of the self remained to be done, or resumed (UP, 10-11).

13. The importance of Foucault vis-à-vis the idea of history is summed up by Le Goff when he says that what Foucault offers is "une philosophie originale de l'histoire étroitement liée à la pratique et à la méthodologie de la discipline historique" (J. LE GOFF, *op. cit.*, p. 296).

14. "On the Genealogy of Ethics." It is here that he gives a description of genealogy as "historical ontology" in general and the *History of Sexuality* in particular as "an historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents" (p. 237).

15. Michel FOUCAULT, "The Concern for Truth," p. 262. Put in these terms, the question posed in the present for these works is why the lifting of sexual prohibitions does not resolve the question of ethics. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 263.

It is clear from this passage that the concern with the concept of an "art of existence" is the main goal of the proposed history, but not because Foucault wishes to *retrieve* an ancient practice, nor is his history meant to describe, as Dreyfus and Rabinow put it, "an attractive and plausible alternative." Foucault explains :

I am not looking for an alternative ; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that's why I don't accept the word "alternative." I would like to do genealogy of problems, or *problematiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same thing as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism.¹⁶

Here we see again how what I have called the idea of *wariness* is connected to the idea of history. The kinds of history Foucault writes help keep us on our guard, keen to the dangers of seductive solutions and unspecified promises which we normally and unthinkingly accept as valid, self-evident, or matter of course. The self-wariness he promotes through his histories is an awareness of a self that is not "the source of self-assertion and exclusion but the target of a questioning through which people might start to depart from the historical limits of their identifications, taking their particularities as so many historical specificities."¹⁷ In other words, its prescriptivism is primarily negative and connected to the political character Foucault emphasized in his earlier work. That is, the ethical considerations of the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality* are intimately linked to the political concerns of the first volume, inasmuch as they are directed, as James W. Bernauer has pointed out, to "an effort to get at a form of becoming a subject that would furnish the source of an effective resistance to a specific and widespread type of power."¹⁸ This is done, through the study of history, by producing "a de-familiarization of the 'desiring man' who lies at the root of our willingness to identify with the form of individual subjectivity constituted for us in the modern period."¹⁹ In other words, the point and purpose of history is to enable us to become self-wary in such a way that the identities "we" (as identified) recognize are loosened such that "we" (considered anonymously) can grasp them for "our-selves" autonomously and independently. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

16. H.L. DREYFUS, P. RABINOW, *op. cit.*, p. 231-232.

17. John RAJCHMAN, *Truth and Eros : Foucault, Lacan, and the Question of Ethics*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 108. This is essential reading for a proper appreciation of Foucault's later work. John Rajchman has also written probably the best brief overview of Foucault's work in his *Michel Foucault, The Freedom of Philosophy*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985.

18. James William BERNAUER, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, Atlantic Highlands, Humanity Press, 1990, p. 166. Bernauer's book is essential for understanding Foucault's *philosophical* contribution, as opposed to reading him exclusively in terms of social and political theorizing.

19. *Ibid.*

III. FROM SELF-MASTERY TO CREATIVITY

First, I would like to examine how Foucault effects this "de-familiarization" in *The Use of Pleasure*. Note that this is something that must be *done* because otherwise what happens is that most histories simply read backwards from the present in order to classify the experience they set out to recount. Here Foucault is consistently using the methods present in the earlier works of not looking for "precursor" ideas but looking instead at the formulation of different problems.²⁰ However, by going back all the way to the Greeks, Foucault is not only seeking to trace the genealogy of the configurations of relations that continue to have a hold on us. He is not merely trying to *identify* them. He wants in effect to allow us the opportunity to "disengage" ourselves from them. This is the purpose of "de-familiarization." And in many ways it resembles the play of continuity and discontinuity that characterizes his earlier work. However, the continuity/discontinuity distinction is not here meant to characterize the historical *process* but rather to characterize the understanding of the *self*.

Thus Foucault turns to the Greeks, who have pride of place in our culture's self-understanding and yet whose practices are in so many ways unfamiliar; especially those practices revolving around sex. The point is, unfamiliarity also presupposes familiarity and, as it turns out, Foucault is intent to focus as well on the continuities surrounding the self-understanding of sexual practices between the Greco-Roman world and the Christian world. Note that Foucault is interested in the *self-understanding* that define those practices and not the practices themselves which, it has long been observed, differ substantially both from those of the early Christians as well as those considered acceptable today. However, just to note some of the major points of difference between pagan sexual practices and Christian ones: they usually revolve around such notions as the nature of the sexual act, where it is connected to sin and the Fall for Christians and given positive connotations for the pagans; other practices revolve around notions of monogamy and fidelity, as well as chastity. And finally, of course, the acceptance and even valorisation of homosexuality in the pagan world is often contrasted with the (until recently) unconditional exclusion of it in Christianity. The general character of these comparisons usually leads to the conclusion that while Christianity seems obsessively concerned with sexual practices, the Greeks appear to be largely indifferent.

However, Foucault argues that this appearance of indifference stems from the fact that sexual practices for the Greeks were neither *codified* nor *monitored* in the same way that such practices were to be within Christianity. They were nevertheless discussed, and evoked similar concerns. For example, monogamy and fidelity were encouraged because there was a fear that unproductive sex had negative effects on a given individual (*i.e.* involves "spending" too much of one's vital energy). As well, homosexual practices were of course accepted, but the image of the effeminate and flaccid male was also current and carried with it clear negative connotations. And, fi-

20. For this aspect of Foucault's historiographical methodology and its indebtedness to Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, cf. Gary GUTTING, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

nally, there was a clear valorisation of sexual abstention (one need only think of Socrates) and its connection with the achievement of truth and wisdom. Thus, we see here important continuities between the attitudes towards certain sexual practices.

So much for continuity and familiarity. What is so *different* (i.e. discontinuous and unfamiliar) about the Greek attitudes towards these sexual practices is that they are not presented as a set or rules for the relation between the sexes but are rather "an elaboration of masculine conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to *their* behaviors" (UP, 22-23). And, furthermore, this elaboration does not take the form of a set of prohibitions or interdictions but rather as, for the individual male, a "stylization of an activity in the exercise of its power and the practice of its liberty" (UP, 23). Here, the purpose for studying the Greeks becomes exceptionally clear inasmuch as the effect of de-familiarization reaches its peak. And yet, again, such a de-familiarization contains within it an element of familiarity (otherwise it would no be described as unfamiliar, but as incomprehensible or unrecognizable) in that the problematization of sexual practices in connection with this notion of "stylisation" is describable in terms of an individual's personal freedom, autonomy, and self-mastery; notions definitely familiar to "our" self-understanding.

The concept that holds together the twin poles of familiarity and unfamiliarity, continuity and discontinuity, is that of *problematization*. The interest in the problematization of sexual practices for Foucault is that it opens up a new conceptual dimension of moral or ethical reflection and activity. While morality and ethics usually involve discussion concerning codes and conduct, Foucault's problematizing approach brings out a third dimension which he calls the *self-constitution of the subject* vis-à-vis these codes and the conduct required of them. That is, this third dimension involves the individual's *choosing to conduct himself* according to the prescriptions of the code. In other words, within any given code, and within the conduct it prescribes, "there are different ways to 'conduct oneself' morally, different ways for the acting individual to operate, not just as an agent, but as an ethical subject of this action" (UP, 26). Thus, one might say, there is an internalization effected between the code and the conduct, and this internalization *is* what one would call the "moral subject." The moral subject is thus something *constituted*.

An individual is not merely related to the — in this case "moral" — world (via codes) but also to himself, and this is not simply in terms of self-awareness, but in a practical and constitutive sense. Or, as Foucault puts it, there is no particular moral action "that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without 'modes of subjectivation' and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them" (UP, 28). And Foucault of course sets as his task the examination of this third dimension of "practices of the self" found in Antiquity surrounding the problematization of pleasure, desire, and sex.

Rather than go in great exegetical detail — I refer the reader directly to the text for Foucault's legendary rhetoric is at a minimum and his clarity is exceptional — I

would simply like to draw out the major features of this "art of existence" Foucault is describing and connect it with the goal of what I have been calling "self-wariness."

Sex is a problem for the Greeks, but not the sexual act in itself. That is, the sexual act is not classified in any particular way and details about it are not normally discussed. One might say that sexual acts are a matter for concern but : "when they were the subject for questioning, what was at issue was not the form they assumed, it was the activity they manifested. Their dynamics was much more important than their morphology" (UP, 42).

There is, within Greek sexual activity, a general unity between act, desire, and pleasure (a unity which, Foucault notes, Christianity will dissociate). That is, the Greeks were not confronted with the problem between the desire for sex, the sexual act itself, and the pleasure one gets from it (it is not a matter of lack and satisfaction). What we have instead is the problem of *force*. That is, it is a question of the *force* (of nature) that unites the three terms. The problem of sexual *activity* (and not the act considered in itself) concerns the dynamics of the triad act-pleasure-desire, which itself is analyzed in terms of two variables : 1) quantity, or more precisely, intensity (homosexuality, for example, is not so much abnormal or unnatural as it is *excessive*) ; 2) the role or polarity, *i.e.* the positioning, of the free adult male (women, slaves, and boys were considered as objects, not as partners, and therefore moral concern was not extended to them).

Immorality, then (for men, since this morality is for and by men), revolves around the notions of *excess* and *passivity*. The sexual act, being natural, is valued ; but it remains a matter of *moral* concern because it is, like all natural things, a force and a force that must be controlled. The question becomes : how is this control to be effected ? Nor from above, nor from without, but from within. What Foucault calls the "use" (*usage, chrēsis*) of pleasure has to do, not with what is permitted or forbidden, but rather with what is a matter "of prudence, of reflection, and calculation in the way one distributed and controlled his acts" (UP, 54). The moral criteria involved in the use of pleasure cannot be codified or tabulated beforehand but is a matter of an individual's assessment of his need, an opportune moment, as well as regard for that individual's status. This is not to say there are no general laws that the individual must also take into account. The laws of nature and the city and indeed of religion cannot be disregarded. However, they serve as the context, or background, of the actions of a particular individual, and not as a code or a model to be adopted. Foucault writes :

The few great common laws — of the city, religion, nature — remained present, but it was as if they traced a very wide circle in the distance, inside of which practical thought had to define what could rightfully be done. And for this there was no need of anything resembling a text that would have the force of law, but rather, of a *technē* or "practice," a *savoir-faire* that by taking general principles into account would guide action in its time, according to its context, and in view of its ends. Therefore, in this form of morality, the individual did not make himself into an ethical subject by universalizing the principles that informed his action ; on the contrary, he did so by means of an attitude and a quest that individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special brilliance by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested (UP, 62).

In this important passage we see how Foucault plays off the familiar with the unfamiliar. He describes a context in which moral or ethical conduct is individualized in a way that is alien to the present's universalizing approach to morality ; namely that that morality has an historical dimension which in effect relativizes its universalizing pretensions. Thus, an individualized and individualizing approach becomes intelligible and perhaps even desirable ; but even more importantly, it renders such a conception *possible*.

But this does not mean that Foucault thinks that the Greek approach is a solution to present concerns. As we have seen, he explicitly denies this on the simple grounds that the problems of the present cannot be resolved by using the solutions of the past. (If history teaches us anything, it teaches us that.) But that does not mean the past therefore has nothing to offer the present. On the contrary, because the past has provided solutions to its problems, and to the extent that its problems share certain similarities with present ones (and they must, otherwise we would be unable to recognize them as problems), what the past has to offer is *perspective*, a vantage point from which to view the present's "self-entanglements," that is, the way the "self" is presently constituted.

The present's view of the self is entangled with notions of freedom, autonomy, and truth. The Greek experience of sex — the subject of Foucault's history — reveals another self entangled in related notions of freedom, self-mastery, and truth. His first volume showed how, in trying to untangle the knot tying together the notions of freedom, autonomy, and truth (the knot might be called "the repressive hypothesis") the knot was only tightened further (talk leading to talk and only talk). Thus, rather than getting entangled further, Foucault turns to past knots which he can untangle because he is not completely tied to them. The knot freedom-autonomy-truth is not the same knot as freedom-self-mastery-truth. The latter he can and does untangle. And he does so, as mentioned above, by examining the "use of pleasure" divided in the triple distinction of desire-pleasure-act. The virtuous "use of pleasure" in Greek experience does not involve the proper ordering or balancing or the triple distinction. The virtue needed for the proper ethical "use of pleasure" revolves around the notion of self-mastery, which is connected to the notion of freedom, not in the sense of the former leading to the latter, but in the sense of the one being constituted by the other. That is, self-mastery is necessary in order to be and remain free. Freedom is here understood as "a certain form of relationship of the individual with himself" (UP, 92). The opposite of freedom on this view is not a natural determinism or a divine will but a kind of slavery ; the opposite of self-mastery would be self-enslavement (*esclavage de soi par soi*). This freedom then is not a freedom from all constraints (the kind of freedom called for by the repressive hypothesis, *i.e.* a "liberating" freedom) but "a power that one brought to bear on oneself in the power that one exercised over others" (UP, 93). As well, in this ethical perspective, self-mastery is also constitutive of truth inasmuch as the truth of the self is not seen as the elucidation and revelation of inner desire, but rather is conceived constitutively as the "*mode of being* of the moderate subject" (UP, 89 ; my emphasis). Thus, the goal or ideal of such an ethical perspective is as follows : "The individual fulfilled himself as an ethical subject by shaping a precisely

measured conduct that was plainly visible to all and deserving to be long remembered" (UP, 91). One might say that this ethical perspective of the self — as opposed to being the inner truth that must be universalized in theory as is the case in the present — must be constitutively externalized in practice in order truly to *be* a self, *i.e.* in order to be free and autonomous. This is what Foucault calls the "aesthetics of existence" characteristic of the Greek experience.

Historically specific and thus capable of being untangled, Foucault shows how the knot of Greek experience has at least one string tied to the present, namely "that some of the main principles of our ethics have been related at a certain moment to an aesthetics of existence"²¹; and that the possibility thus exists for an ethics based on an individual's creating a work of art out of his or her life. Thus, rather than proposing a return to the Greek triad of freedom-self-mastery-truth, Foucault seems to be arguing for a new triad one might describe as freedom-*creativity*-truth. This would be a new "aesthetics of existence" where one's *life* is to be one's work of art. It is within this creative possibility that a new relation between freedom and truth resides.

Note that Foucault is arguing for a creative *life* and not a creative *self*, as in, for example, the radical freedom of the existentialist self. Foucault is careful to distinguish himself from a view such as Sartre's :

From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence : we have to create ourselves as works of art. In his analyses of Baudelaire, Flaubert, etc., it is interesting to see that Sartre refers the work of creation to a certain relation to oneself — the author to himself — which has the form of authenticity or inauthenticity. I would like to say exactly the contrary : we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to creative activity.²²

And thus the need for the particular kind of historical analysis Foucault offers. It shows the different (creative) ways individuals have been related to themselves, thereby removing the necessity of current predominant ones. While all of this is rather upbeat and positive, the removal of the sense of necessity does not by itself remove the effective constitutive relations individuals have to themselves. Foucault is pointing to a possibility not a reality. The reality is that most individuals are bound and tied to particular "selves" that leave little room for creativity. This is because most individuals do not see their "selves" (or more precisely, their *lives*) as a creative activity, but as something to be uncovered, discovered, recovered, and ultimately obeyed. This is the sense of self Foucault is combating, the idea that one's *life* should be devoted to discovering one's true self. These are the selves Foucault is wary of (thus the need for and function of self-wariness rather than self-awareness). History shows that these selves are many, demanding of the individual things like submission, obedience, or renunciation. Amongst these possibilities, there is one to which Foucault pays particular attention in his last work ; it is a self that calls for careful concern, and it is this concern for self that I would like to consider next.

21. H.L. DREYFUS, P. RABINOW, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 237.

IV. FRAGILE IDENTITIES

To recapitulate : the self is constituted. This is the fundamental claim of the last two volumes of the *History of Sexuality*. The self is not given, it is constituted through a set of practices within a given historical context. The self is thus an historical object, subject to change and transformation. Historical analysis and research enables us to identify those practices constitutive of different kinds of selves, and does not therefore provide the self with an identity (as some would have history do).

The point that Foucault is making is that the self is not the product of a particular activity in the sense that the product can be detached from the activity ; the self *is* the activity. The self is constituted by a set of practices but it is not those practices ; rather it resides in the *way* those practices are taken up. But taken up by whom ? The answer is : by particular *individuals*.

In order to be clear about this point, I would like to introduce an idea suggested by my reading of much contemporary historiography and its efforts to distinguish itself from sociology (inasmuch as sociology is much more "theory-driven" than history is). The idea is that of the *anonymous individual*. This is the term I give to all those individual human beings who people the historical process and are the subject-matter of historical reconstructions and yet remain unnamed. That is, they are the individuals that historians refer to when they speak of peasants and warriors, or doctors, teachers and lawyers, vagabonds and bandits. The idea of an anonymous individual is an historical concept, and not a sociological one, inasmuch as the primary reference is to the actual flesh and blood individuals who were peasants, doctors, criminals, etc. Put another way, although the subject-matter of both these disciplines may be the same — the activities of these people — the reference is not. For sociology, the reference is to the function and role of the activities themselves ; for history, the reference is to the (past) lives of human individuals. Sociology has as its goal the explanation of human behaviour ; history the task of describing past human lives. The results of sociological investigations are destined for various administrative and governmental uses ; historical investigations are undertaken with the view of achieving a particular kind of "self-knowledge."

I would like to use this concept of the anonymous individual in order to distinguish between the concrete (*i.e.* bodily) individual human being and his or her *self*.²³ The attempt to distinguish them is not meant to say that there are individuals out there who are not also selves, or selves that are not individuals. Rather, the distinction is to help us understand the different elements involved in the way human beings relate, not only to the world and others, but to themselves as well. Indeed, the distinction I am trying to make is implicit in the very expression : one's relation to oneself. The "one" here refers to the individual considered anonymously related to that same individual considered as a specifiable self with specifiable characteristics. And the

23. One might want to say that the distinction is simply between the social, cultural, symbolic properties of human beings as opposed to their physical and biological ones. However, since this is a problem of *historical* reference, appeals to biology and physics are not really helpful. The distinction is not between the physical and mental but between *real* and hypothetical or ideal.

relation is one of "identity" when there is no conflict or gap between the individual considered anonymously and the individual considered as a particular self. That is, the self is complete, such that the individual totally identifies with it and does not distinguish himself from that self. However, more often than not, and perhaps today more than in the past, an individual can distinguish himself from that self and consider himself "anonymously" *i.e.* independently of the different roles and functions he is "said" to have and which make up his sense of self. And to the extent that he can do this, then the relation he has to himself is no longer one of *identity* but instead becomes problematic and a matter for concern.

Which brings us to the third volume of Foucault's history of sexuality, *Le Souci de soi*, usually translated as *The Care of the Self*. The use of the terms "care" to translate "*souci*" is to a certain extent quite appropriate given that the work does deal with medical texts devoted to what today we would characterize as "health care." However, *souci* also can be translated by *worry* and *concern*, as in having concerns or worries about some matter.

Both senses are reflected in Foucault's work inasmuch as an increasing concern for self displayed in late Antiquity — that is, concern for what was seen as the self's "fragility" — led to the preoccupation (another word for *souci*) by doctors and moralists in their writings to develop a careful practice of examination and *care* for one's self. This care and concern found expression in the writings of those doctors and moralists explicitly concerned with sexual matters and what they thought was a sign of the "immorality and dissolute ways" (CS, 39) of their society. However, what is interesting and remarkable (and directly relevant to the present's concerns) is that :

[...] this desire for rigor expressed by the moralists did not take the form of a demand for intervention on the part of public authority. One would not find in the writings of the philosophers any proposal for a general and coercive legislation of sexual behaviors. They urge individuals to be more austere if they wish to lead a life different from that of "the throngs"; they do not try to determine which measures or punishments might constrain everyone in a uniform manner (CS, 40).

We see here again the anti-universalist thrust of Foucault's analysis. He considers these writings of the moralists and philosophers of late Antiquity and their call for austerity precisely because they are *not* proposing a blueprint of model to be applied or constructed ; it is rather addressed to *individuals*. Foucault is aware that this appeal to individuals is often seen as reflecting the more general weakening of the social and political structures characteristic of late Antiquity. Unstable periods are characteristically said to give rise to this kind of "individualism" where people retreat into their private lives where things can more readily appear under control.

However, this kind of "explanation" is historically suspect. Lumping together different phenomena under the rubric "the rise of individualism" serves only to obscure matters that need to be carefully distinguished. The term "individualism" can describe what Foucault calls different "realities." He distinguishes and describes three of these :

Three things in fact need to be distinguished here : 1) the individualistic attitude, characterized by the absolute value attributed to the individual in his singularity and by the de-

gree of independence conceded to him vis-à-vis the group to which he belongs and the institutions to which he is answerable ; 2) the positive valuation of private life, that is, the importance granted to family relationships, to the forms of domestic activity, and to the domain of patrimonial interests ; 3) the intensity of the relations to self, that is, of the forms in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation (CS, 42).

Note that Foucault calls what he is describing here different "attitudes." This of course is connected with the kind of "ethics" we discussed in the last section that dealt not with codes and practices principally but with the *way* in which codes were understood and practices undertaken. The same applies here. He acknowledges immediately that these different "attitudes" need not be mutually exclusive ; although different periods in history can be seen as characterized by the predominance of one or the other. For examples, he uses ancient warrior societies as exemplifying the first ; nineteenth century bourgeois society the second ; and certain early Christian ascetic movements as typical of the third.

The point of making these distinctions is to show that the period he is describing, while obviously fitting in a general way with the third "attitude" described above, displays a specific kind of "individualism" — if one can even call it that — which revolves around the general idea of a "*culture de soi*." Foucault argues that this idea reaches far back in Greek culture and is characterized by the general principle that one should take care of oneself (*prendre soin de soi-même*). One finds it in Xenophon, Plutarch (when discussing the Spartans), and of course in Plato's Socrates. It is the guiding principle of what Foucault calls the "art of existence" of the period he is describing, and in the course of its development it had taken on a very general sense which Foucault summarizes as follows :

[...] the principle of care of oneself became rather general in scope. The precept according to which one must give attention to oneself was in any case an imperative that circulated among a number of different doctrines. It also took the form of an attitude, a mode of behaviour ; it became instilled in ways of living ; it evolved into procedures, practices, and formulas that people reflected on, developed, perfected, and taught. It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge, and to the elaboration of a science [*savoir*] (CS, 45).

Thus, if one still wants to call this "care or concern for the self" and individualism, then it is certainly not the kind of individualism characterized by autonomy and independence as in the first model ; nor by the retreat into privacy typical of the second ; nor even is it properly applied to the third model of purification and salvation. If we describe these "individualisms" as the relation *one* (considered anonymously) has with *oneself*, then the first identifies the self with the will, the second with the private enjoyment of one's possessions, and the third with one's purified soul. As distinct from these, Foucault describes a relation with oneself as the care one gives to a fragile and vulnerable body in need of constant attention. In other words, it is something that takes a great deal of time and effort. The point of considering the self as a fragile body emphasizes that the relation with the self is not something that is sought after as a goal, or an end, as a prize, or discovery, but is rather a continuous

process. It is not the culmination or point or object of all other activities but relates to the way those activities are undertaken ; it is not the focal point but the *center* of those activities. The concern for self should be seen principally as "a change of activity : not that one must cease all other forms of occupation and devote oneself entirely and exclusively to oneself ; but in the activities that one ought to engage in, one had best keep in mind that the chief objective one should set for oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself" (CS, 64-65).

The interest of this relation to self is that, while still connected to the ethics of self-mastery, there is what Foucault calls an "*infléchissement*," a bending, a slight change of direction or accent. What we have at this point is a unique situation where the self is poised, as it were, between a complete immersion and identification within given practices and an abstract universalism. The sexual morality promulgated by doctors and philosophers testifies to this in that it continues to demand "that the individual conform to a certain art of living which defines the aesthetic and ethical criteria of existence" on the one hand, but on the other "this art refers more and more to universal principles of nature or reason, which everyone must observe in the same way, whatever their social status" (CS, 67). This shift towards universal appeals does in effect dislocate the self from its embeddedness (like a bone dislocated from its socket) without, however, abandoning the individual body, as it were (that is, the person acting out her life at a particular time and place — we are still within the ambit of an "aesthetics of existence"). Here we see more clearly the point and purpose of Foucault's advocacy of the cogency of such an "aesthetics of existence." It is a mode of existence that is free from the unquestioned habit of local practices as well as resistant to the call to universal norms and rules directed for and directed by what Bernauer calls "a science of life" in the sense that characterizing "human existence as a work of art is to remove it from the domain of the scientifically knowable and free us from the obligation of deciphering ourselves as a system of timeless functions that are subject to corresponding norms."²⁴ Putting it in these terms is of course showing the interest the "aesthetics of existence" has for the *present* ; it is clearly not what best describes the Greek experience. Once again, Foucault is attempting to set up a picture that is at once familiar and unfamiliar, continuous and discontinuous.

The Care of the Self is devoted to the historical analysis of this new attitude towards the self which has the individual poised between concrete identification and universal appeal. Probably the best example he gives of this dislocation from embedded practices or relating oneself to oneself is most evident in what Foucault calls the "political game," that is, in political practices. He argues that the dismantling of the City-States and the growth of Empire is not best described in terms of a decline of civic life and political elites and a retreat or withdrawal into self. The important point is that the extension of the Empire required changes in "the conditions of the exercise of power" (CS, 83) in the sense that the administrative reach had to be adjusted to a widened Empire. Thus what we see is not the decline and decadence of a civic elite, but rather we are confronted with "the search for a new way of conceiving the rela-

24. J.W. BERNAUER, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

tionship that one ought to have with one's status, one's functions, one's activities, and one's obligations" (CS, 84). In other words, the new political realities required a different understanding of oneself as a political actor. Given the wider circumstances (and unfamiliar ones) in which "one" had to act politically, "one" became more acutely aware of the outward signs of function and role (uniform, habits, gestures) and, concomitantly, one became increasingly aware and concerned with that which was *not* connected to these functions and roles. Or, to put it another way, one became increasingly aware of, and concerned with, the nature of one's relation (as an *individual* considered anonymously) to these roles and functions. And once this step is taken, then the whole relation one has with oneself is rendered problematic. Indeed, the attitude one has towards one's own acts becomes problematic. That is, one's status and position no longer dictate what "one" is to do. That status may be responsible for the general outline of one's situation, but it is the individual who is responsible for the actions "one" undertakes. Put in terms of political action, the individual exercising power "has to place himself in field of complex relations where he occupies a transition point. His status may have placed him there ; it is not his status, however, that determined the rules to follow and the limits to observe" (CS, 88).

Again, it is important to note that in describing this particular relation to self Foucault is not proposing an ideal to be adopted or even emulated. This would be to miss the point of historical analysis. What he is doing is describing a historical possibility that does not find its *raison d'être* in what came before nor in what followed. It is the familiarity and the unfamiliarity of the period in question and are not meant to subsume it into a uniform and linear process. *The Care of the Self*, like most of Foucault's work, is set up precisely to make the contrast evident. He contrasts the "*culture de soi*" of late Antiquity with the earlier model of self-mastery discussed in *The Use of Pleasure*. He also makes frequent references to the future relation to self characteristic of early Christianity (the subject-matter of the unpublished *Les Aveux de la chair*) in order to contrast it with the period in question. In his conclusions to *The Care of the Self*, he takes up the themes discussed in detail in the book and emphasizes the continuity and discontinuity of the period in question. He writes :

A certain style of sexual conduct is thus suggested by this whole movement of moral, medical, and philosophical reflection. It is different from the style that had been delineated in the fourth century, but it is also different from the one that will be found in Christianity. Here sexual activity is linked to evil by its form and its effects, but in itself and substantially, it is not an evil. It finds its natural fulfillment in marriage, but — with certain exceptions — marriage is not an express, indispensable condition for it to cease being an evil. It has trouble finding its place in the love of boys, but the latter is not therefore condemned as being contrary to nature (CS, 239).

The interest of Foucault's work, then, is the way it describes a period that is poised between the aesthetics of self-mastery and an abstract moralism where the concrete bodily individual is nothing and the "soul" everything. However, the interest of the period is not in its character as a *threshold*, a watershed between what came before and what comes after, in the continuing story of something called the "self." This character of being a threshold or a watershed is not specific to this particular period but is rather characteristic of *any* period inasmuch as it is considered as a pres-

ent, situated between a past and a future. In other words, any present, considered in itself, is a threshold between the past and the future. Rather, the interest of *The Care of the Self* is the particular relation to self it describes : the care and concern for a fragile self, one not *grounded* in unquestioned and unquestionable practices, and yet one still constituted in its relations to others. It is this historical (and therefore real) *possibility* that is of interest.

V. ACTUALIZING POSSIBILITIES

But what, exactly, is meant by the phrase "historical possibility" ? (Especially if we recognize that the point is not to revive and relive the past in any practical sense.) The notion of possibility here is contrasted with that of *necessity* inasmuch as history teaches that current practices do not express ahistorical essences or necessary features of human "being," but express rather contingent configurations or relations. This includes those relations in which individuals relate to their selves as selves. The purpose of the type of historical analysis Foucault proposes — the exploration of different historical "possibilities" — also serves as the basis for a certain *wariness* vis-à-vis the constitutive functions that make up the relation between the individual and his or her self ; a wariness, that is, based on the contingent character of those relations and directed to the appearance of necessity, and perhaps more importantly, to the appeal to necessity.

However, the notion of possibility can also be contrasted with the notion of *actuality* as well. That is, if one recognizes that the actual world is a contingent matter of fact, *i.e.* that it could have turned out differently than it actually has, then one is saying that the actual world is only one possibility amongst many possibilities (or one set or configuration of possibilities amongst many). Yet, actuality is not *merely* one set of possibilities amongst others for the simple reason that it is not a *mere* possibility but an actual one. Actuality is, as it were, actualized or real possibility as opposed to possibility considered as such.²⁵ This gives actuality or the actual world or the real world a kind of distinctiveness and concreteness that merely possible worlds do not possess.

What does this have to do with Foucault's approach to historical possibility ? The distinctiveness of the actual world raises the question of why this particular set of possibilities was actualized and not some other set. And the question is normally answered by looking to the antecedent conditions which "led up" to this particular set of actualized possibilities. This way of answering the question further distinguishes actuality from other possibilities because only actuality is tied in a more or less clear way to its antecedent conditions whereas mere possibilities remain "open" and unconnected to anything real. What this does, in effect, is provide the temptation to remove actuality from the realm of possibility altogether and place it within the realm of necessity. The purpose here, of course, is not to say that actuality or the actual

25. For the connections between actuality, possibility, and necessity, cf. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, translated by A.V. Miller, Atlantic Highlands, Humanities Press, 1969, the section on "Actuality," p. 541-553.

world necessarily, that is, by means of a necessary process, came to be what it in fact is ; but that because it is what it is, then it is reasonable to ask why this is so, and to do this one is said to go back and ascertain the necessary conditions that permitted the actual set of possibilities to be the ones that were, in effect, actualized. Thus, history becomes the inquiry of what it is in the past that made the present possible, *i.e.* actual, that actualized possibility that it is.

This is where Foucault comes in. I have noted that Foucault rejects the view of history that sees the present as the culmination of the past. Now we can clearly see why : this approach has the effect of removing the present from the realm of possibility by giving it the character (and illusion) of necessity. It is true that the present can be described as an actualized set of possibilities and it is also true that actualized possibilities differ from *mere* possibilities by the simple fact of their actuality. However, it is not true that actual or present possibilities are the only *real* ones. Reality is not exhausted by actuality. At least, not if the idea of an "historical reality" makes sense.

The problem is that the idea of "actualized possibilities" is ambiguous. It could refer to possibilities that *have been* actualized. Or it could refer to possibilities that currently *are being* actualized. Stating things this way, however, clears up matters considerably. Possibilities that have been actualized obviously refer to the past ; while possibilities that are being actualized clearly refer to the present. Here we see the problem with the view of history that sees the present as the culmination of the past : in doing so it in effect treats *the present as though it were past*, *i.e.* as something that *has been* actualized. Thus, its point of departure is not the "real" present — a set of possibilities currently being actualized — but an "imaginary" present, one that is deemed complete. However, one can only find possibilities that have been actualized in the sense of "completed" *in the past*. Possibilities that are currently being actualized are being actualized in the various practices that make up the present, including of course the practice of historical analysis.

Foucault's mode of historical analysis — the exploration of historical possibilities — is designed to respond to this ambiguous and complex situation. He analyzes historical possibilities that *have been* actualized — for example, Greek and Roman practices of self — in a way that reveals the connections (and disconnections) those possibilities have with possibilities that *are currently being* actualized, *i.e.* modern practices and relations to the self, characterized in terms of relations of power and in terms of the repressive hypothesis. However, because there are certain connections between the two sets of possibilities (those that *have been* and those that *are being* actualized) and because the latter are still "open" in the sense of being on-going, then, history does not only tell us about the past, but helps, indeed provides the tools for restructuring the present, not from scratch, nor from some point outside of it, but from within its on-going process. The actualized possibilities of the past, through historical analysis, offer perspectives on the possibilities being actualized in the present.

It is for this reason that the suspicion characteristic of Foucault's approach is not gratuitous nor destructive. It is, one might say, a functional characteristic of historical analysis, especially if one considers historical analysis as the play between the familiar and the unfamiliar. We can now also characterize this "play" as expressing the two senses of "actualized possibilities": present configurations are familiar while past configurations are unfamiliar on the one hand, and on the other, past possibilities can be made intelligible, thus familiar, and can then enable us to see present possibilities from a different perspective, thus rendering them unfamiliar.

VI. CONCLUSION

If we are to sum up our discussion, then, what Foucault provides in the last two volumes of his *History of Sexuality* is a response to the present and to our self-understanding by offering a *perspective* from which to view them, thereby suggesting the possibility of moving beyond them.

The Use of Pleasure described a possibility of one's relation to oneself as characterized by the triad of freedom-self-mastery-truth that contrasts with the present triad freedom-autonomy-truth. Thus while the present is familiar with the idea of the self freely related to its own truth, it is not through the mode of self-mastery but through the mode of an autonomous relation to the universal. The point of contrasting the two is to reveal the possibility of *creativity* implicit in the mode of self-mastery; creativity, that is, vis-à-vis the codes and rules regulating conduct, and thus of introducing this possibility of creativity into the open (because currently on-going) possibilities being actualized in the present.

The Care of the Self, for its part, described the possibility of a mode of caring and concern for the self — contrasting it the present's "technological" approach to the self²⁶ — and thereby introduced the notion of a *fragile* self, one in need of constant attention. Thus, according to Foucault, if one is to entertain or practice a freely creative or creatively free relation to one's self as truth, then one should also take care to account for the *fragility* of that self and its truth. At least, this is what Foucault's historical analysis appears to suggest. The exploration of historical possibilities that *have been* actualized are thus turned into possibilities that join those that *are currently being* actualized in the present.

Here we see the positive role of the concept of self-wariness that has been a focus of this presentation of Foucault. The wariness it advocates is not only directed towards the imposition of particular selves such that complete identification is attained, but is also directed to the protection and sustenance — not of this or that particular self — but of the possibility of freely and creatively relating to self. And the only guarantee of this possibility, at least within the possibilities currently being actualized in the present, is the continuous exploration and analysis of *historical* possibilities, for it is by means of history that one can, through the contrast between the familiar

26. Cf. E.H. MARTIN *et al.*, *Technologies of the Self*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

and the unfamiliar it offers, dis-connect oneself from one's self and one's present, and open up a space for what Foucault has called "the undefined work of freedom."²⁷

Thus, it is only if the present remains open to the past, both in its understanding of it and in its relation to it, that it can guarantee that it will remain open — not to the future, the future remains open by definition — but to itself, and to its current possibilities.

27. M. FOUCAULT, "What is Enlightenment ?," in P. Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 46.