Foucault and Elias: Two Approaches to the Self and Society

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School of Social Sciences and Humanities
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a discussion on some of the similarities, as well as differences, that exist between the approaches and arguments made by Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias regarding the self and society. Foucault’s works are ‘histories of the present’, and his key concepts of discourse, power and knowledge offer some useful insights regarding the notion of the self and society. Foucault argues that the experience of the self is cultivated within discursive formations and practices. Elias takes a ‘figurational’ approach to sociological inquiry, arguing that individuals are not static or separate from society, but are involved in constantly changing interdependent networks. Elias regards the sense of self – ‘habitus’ – as being developed within these figurations, and argues that the structural processes over time within Western society have moved towards a more ‘civilised’ and ‘self-constrained’ habitus. This thesis offers discussion regarding the convergence and alignment present between the works of Foucault and Elias, and argues that each may contribute to the other.
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