Foucault and Elias: Two Approaches to the Self and Society

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Thesis for Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Honours

School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Murdoch University

2012
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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Full Name of Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Honours

Thesis Title: Foucault and Elias: Two Approaches to the Self and Society

Author: Lachlan Grant Denning

Year: 2012
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.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I give many thanks to my wonderful partner, Rubie Hellmrich, for her continued support and patience throughout this project, particularly regarding my repeated disappearance into the library. Thank you for calming my mind and reminding me how to have fun, climb trees and eat fairy floss – you are, without a doubt, amazing.

I must also thank my mother and father, Deanne and Mark Denning, who have always, unrelentingly, supported me and encouraged me to learn about the world and to question what I assume to be ‘true’ – a gift I will always be thankful for.

Finally, I thank my supervisor, Barbara Evers, for helping steer me in the right direction, for her kindness and invaluable advice, and for her support and encouragement in reading Foucault and Elias.

Thanks,

Lachlan
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis offers a discussion on some of the similarities that exist between the approaches and arguments made by Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias regarding the self and society. I will discuss some of the work of Michel Foucault, with a particular focus on his analytical approach, discussing the methods and key concepts he developed for analysing and viewing the social world, as well as how he utilised this approach to analyse selfhood in what he calls ‘the technologies of the self’. The thesis will also explore the figurational sociology of Norbert Elias and how he utilised this approach to analyse the self and the ‘civilizing processes’, as well as his criticism of the notion of the self as *homo clausus*. Importantly, I will demonstrate some of the similarities that are present between the approaches taken by the two scholars in their works on the self, and aim to reopen the scholarship regarding the convergence of their approaches.

Much of Foucault’s work is what he calls a ‘history of the present’, which involves focusing on some current problem or issue and then tracing the historical contingencies and continuities that shaped the issue. Foucault’s understanding of history is significantly different to that of traditional historiography in that he viewed history not as a single, unified object, but as being continuously shifting, overlapping and retold (1972, pp. 3, 9-10). In his later works, Foucault focused his analyses on the ways in which discursive techniques and practices come to shape the experience of the self and the
behaviours which result; Foucault emphasised the capacity of discourses to “shape, constrict, and distort human impulses and the sense of self” (Smith, 1999, p. 81). Foucault provides a researcher with a ‘toolbox’ of methods and approach (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 50), particularly regarding the self, and this thesis will discuss what these tools are and how he applied them to the study of the self.

In The Civilizing Process (2000), Elias explores how the structure of society is in a constant process of change, as well as how these processes led to changes in standards of behaviour and the sense of self – to changes in individual ‘habitus’ (2000, p. xi). The approach developed by Elias is one which understands society as a process of changing figurations, where figurations refers to the networks of social interdependencies among human beings (2000, pp. 481-482). Using this approach, Elias argues that social processes during the early formation of what we call ‘states’ led to changes in interpersonal behaviour to more controlled, peaceful and less impulsive forms, and to a type of ‘self-restraint’ towards ‘civility’ (Elias, 2000, p. xi).

It may at first appear that the approaches taken by Foucault and Elias toward understanding the self and society have little in common (Smith, 1999, p. 79). Foucault’s account of the self and society regards the ‘truth’ of the self as existing in discursive formations produced through various practices and techniques of power and the self (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18), while Elias understands the sense of self and the related forms of behaviour as being acquired within the
interdependent networks of humans, such as within families and nations – that is, forms of behaviour and a sense of self are acquired “in conjunction with other people, from the structure of society in which the individual grows up” (Elias, 1991, p. 36). An example of the distinct difference between the two scholars, pointed out by Dennis Smith (1999, p. 80), is that Elias relied quite explicitly on the work of Sigmund Freud and the psychoanalytical school of thought (Elias, 2000, p. 527), while Foucault’s work, particularly in Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality (2008a), argued quite strongly against Freud’s ‘repressive hypothesis’ (Foucault, 2008a, p. 10).

Nonetheless, I was struck by some of the similarities that exist between the arguments and thinking of Foucault and Elias, particularly in their arguments regarding the self and society. Robert van Krieken (1990) and Dennis Smith (1999) have provided useful discussions on some of the ways in which similarities exist between the approaches of Foucault and Elias. Also, Andrea Bührman and Stefanie Ernst (2010) edited a publication which explored some of the similarities regarding Foucault and Elias, with a focus on how their works can be utilised towards analysis of the 21st century. However, apart from these works, the scholarship is considerably lacking and it is an area that is open for further work and discussion; therefore, this thesis aims to reopen the discussion and scholarship regarding the similarities between the approaches and arguments of Foucault and Elias. This thesis will demonstrate some of the ways in which their approaches converge, and in doing so, argue that researchers aiming to study the
self and society may be able to utilise a unique combination of Foucault’s and Elias’ approaches.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One will introduce some of the key concepts and methods developed and utilised by Foucault, which have provided a variety of scholars with a ‘toolbox’ for analysing the social world (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 50). Accordingly, this chapter will discuss Foucault’s understanding of discourse and his non-traditional view of power, which are essential concepts for understanding what Foucault’s approach involves. This chapter will also discuss Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical methods for exploring the history of some topic of inquiry. After discussing Foucault’s methods, the chapter will then focus on Foucault’s approach to the experience of the self through techniques of governmentality and the ‘technologies of the self’. These refer to the practices and systems of knowledge which are utilised by the individual to subjectify themselves and thus cultivate their sense and experience of selfhood. This chapter will show how Foucault utilises his methods to explore the historical contingencies of the self, and demonstrate some the ways in which his approach can be useful.

Chapter Two will then turn to the work of Elias, discussing his approach of figurational sociology and how this was utilised to explore the notion of homo clausus (the enclosed human), and the ‘civilizing processes’ of the self. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to Elias’ work regarding his
unique understanding of the self, and his approach and arguments regarding the self and society. This will provide the basis for further discussion in Chapter Three on the ways in which Foucault’s and Elias’ approaches converge, as well as how they may offer further insights for new research.

Chapter Three will focus on the similarities and differences that are present in the approaches taken by Foucault and Elias. Specifically, this chapter will offer some discussion on the similarities, as well as noting some differences, that are present in their conceptions and approaches to power, their similar approach to undermine the notion of the self as operating separately to society, their similar (but also different) take on the development of knowledge, their mutual sense of a transition in Western history towards a changing sense of self, and the ways in which both scholars approach the concern for the self or self-constraint. I will argue here that there is some junction in both the approaches and arguments taken by Foucault and Elias regarding the self and society.

Overall, this thesis will provide the reader with an understanding of Foucault’s methods and demonstrate their usefulness by showing how he utilised them to explore the ‘techniques of the self’. I will compare and contrast these with Elias’ figurational approach to the self and the ‘civilizing processes’ and demonstrate the convergence that exists in their respective approaches and arguments, arguing that both scholars offer useful approaches that may be able to be utilised in conjunction in future research. It is important to note that this thesis does not aim to criticise Foucault’s and Elias’ respective approaches and arguments, since that...
is beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis does not aim to discuss all of Foucault’s and Elias’ arguments or works (since that is also beyond the scope), but to provide the reader with a good understanding of both scholars’ approaches to the self and society, and also to demonstrate to the reader how these approaches and arguments have some similarities, despite their differences.
CHAPTER 1 – Foucault’s Approach: Discourse, Power and the Genealogy of the Self

This chapter aims to explore what Foucault’s key concepts and methods are and what they provide him with the capacity to do in his work, as well as show how he applies this approach to the study of the self and society. For Foucault, ‘truth’ is not universal, fundamental or innate. With his concepts of discourse and power, Foucault was interested in how ‘games of truth’ produce bodies of knowledge through which the ‘truth’, as an assumed universality, is told; these discourses produce the framework through which we understand and view the world, and thus our current way of viewing the ‘truth’, and viewing ourselves, is determined by the discourses within which we operate. This chapter introduces what it means to take a Foucaultian approach to the analysis of some problem or topic, and will then explore Foucault’s study of the self through techniques of governmentality and technologies of the self. In this chapter, I will first explore Foucault’s notion of discourse in further detail; this is followed by a discussion on Foucault’s understanding of power and its relation to the production of bodies of knowledge, and by a discussion of Foucault’s historical methods of archaeology and genealogy, which act as the tools utilised to reveal the ways in which what is assumed to be true is historically contingent. Once Foucault’s key concepts and methods are properly understood, the chapter will then turn to Foucault’s analysis of the cultivation of the self through techniques of governmentality and technologies of the self.
Foucault’s Concepts and Approach

Discourse

For Foucault, the notion of discourse refers to a set of statements and practices which are regular and systematic in their organisation; discourses are productive in nature, and produce ‘knowledge’ and ‘truths’ – they systematically create and construct the knowledges and subjects about which they are concerned and of which they speak, and thus inform the mythologies and frameworks that societies have for understanding and viewing the world (Foucault, 1971, p. 8; Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 34). As discourses develop, they not only provide social actors with specific and delimited ways of understanding the world, but also produce the subject of which they speak. That is not to say that discourses construct objects and subjects metaphysically (or, fundamentally), but construct them in the sense that any meaning attached to them, and the ‘truths’ which we understand to belong to them, are produced and reproduced through discourse. It is within discourses themselves that meanings, understandings and knowledges exist (Hall, 2001, pp. 72-73). For example, before the current discourse on sexuality developed, starting in the 18th century, there was not a discursive ‘void’ – the precursors to this discourse, such as the alliance of kinship ties and the use of pleasure based on self-mastery, existed, as did the object itself (sex) – but the current understandings of what sexuality is and how it plays out in the social world are developed through the discourse itself (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 35). In this way, discourses are innovative and may change. Foucault uses this notion of discourse to provide histories of systems of thought in order to observe the different, changing and historically contingent instances of the material
conditions by which the world is understood and constructed (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 34-35).

Although this at first appears somewhat abstract in nature, discourse actually exists in explicit and observable instances – discourse is the corpus of statements (where statements are both practices and discursive words) about a particular topic (Foucault, 1991b, p. 54). Discourse does not exist within thinking or cognition, but within the materials of discourse – discourses are not the product of private thinking or thought processes, but the product of the operation of public apparatuses which exist no ‘deeper’ than on the social ‘surface’. Discourse exists not only in linguistics, but within the organisation of practices and statements, and within the rules which organise those linguistics (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 36-38). In this sense, discourses take their form within a variety of mechanisms, such as books, journal articles, formal and informal discussions, letters, court judgements and government proceedings. Further to this, there is no ‘outside’ to discourse; that is to say that we do not assume a ‘deeper outside’ that exists beyond the material conditions of discourse, and there is no external ‘reality’ of some topic that exists beyond discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 36-38).

Foucault starts from a standpoint far different from traditional history; whereas traditional history presumes ‘already given objects’, Foucault starts from the decision that ‘universals’ do not exist:
I start from the theoretical and methodological decision that consists in saying... How can you write history if you do not accept *a priori* the existence of things like the state, society, the sovereign, and subjects... So what I would like to deploy here is exactly the opposite of historicism: not, then, questioning universals by using history as a critical method, but starting from the decision that universals do not exist, asking what kind of history we can do (Foucault, 2008b, pp. 2-3).

In such a way, anything we take to be universally true is true only within discourse (Foucault, 2008b, p. 3). For example, the notion of sexuality is itself developed and maintained within discourse, and it does not exist in some external ‘reality’ (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 38). In this sense, discourse is not abstract or cognitive, nor is there an external ‘reality’ to which a discourse refers (although a discourse, in its ‘truth-telling’ nature, will claim or assume to do so); rather, discourse exists within the specific material conditions of a particular topic – there is only the surface material conditions of discourse, and that is where Foucault focuses his analyses, which he argues is significantly different to a traditional historiography (Foucault, 1972, p. 127; Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 38).

Not everything is discourse, and Foucault does not deny the existence of the non-discursive, such as the entity which is the ‘body’. However, non-discursive entities do not exist within a non-discursive ‘vacuum’ – the non-discursive is influenced by, and is under the sovereignty of, discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 39). For example, sex may be considered a non-discursive act, and bodies are non-discursive entities, but the words themselves are discursive, as are
the conceptualisations attributed to them. Further, the ways in which bodies are understood and acted upon within the social world, including the act of sex, are determined and controlled by discourse – sexual acts are influenced by discourses on sexuality, such as the discourses of Christian ethics and the apparatuses of the Church, which delimit what can and cannot be said, as well as what can and cannot be practiced (Foucault, 1990, pp. 10-13; Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 39). In this way, Foucault’s notion of discourse encompasses the discursive and the non-discursive, which are inseparable – discourse is continuously encompassing the non-discursive, and a practice is both material and discursive (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 46).

By exploring and analysing discourse, Foucault is interested not only in the content of some discourse, but also (and more specifically) the rules which determine the production of that discourse; as Foucault says, “the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures” (1971, p. 8). These rules form the discourse in its regular and systematic organisation; that is, a discourse is defined as individualised by its set of rules of formation for all of its statements, rather than by its specific content (Foucault, 1991b, p. 54). While concepts and statements within the same discursive formation may be incongruent or incompatible with one another, they follow the same set of rules in their formation, and “there is an individualized discursive formation whenever it is possible to define such a set of rules” (Foucault, 1991b, p. 54). For example, Foucault is not interested in the fixed meanings of symbols and words as such, but the rules by which particular
meanings are established within a specific discourse; these rules can be seen as practiced through public apparatuses such as schooling, church rituals and publication processes (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 43). Further to this, of interest to Foucault are the rules which mark the boundaries about what can and cannot be said within a particular discourse – discourses produce ‘truths’ about particular topics, and in doing so delimit what is sayable and thinkable (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). For example, within the current biomedical discourse it could be said that some disease is caused by a particular virus in the blood-stream, but any explanation which employs witchcraft or alternative medical frameworks as its root – such as the malady being the result of the particular phase of the moon, or the misalignment of the spine, respectively – cannot be accepted as ‘true’ within the discourse, and is disallowed and excluded. That is, there are rules about what can and cannot be said, and these rules organise the production of discourses and their knowledges, as well as what new statements can be made (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 44). In such a way, ‘games of truth’ lead to the facilitation of relations of power, and thus power and knowledge are intimately linked within discourse (Foucault, 1995, pp. 27-28).

**Power and Knowledge**

Traditional perspectives view power as a zero-sum quantitative capacity, where power is something ‘possessed’ in quantitative amounts by individuals or institutions, and by which those who hold more of it utilise it as a tool of domination over others (Hindess, 1996, p. 2). With this understanding of power, we are limited in that it is only by observing overt (or, sometimes covert) conflicts that we can determine and discuss the distribution of power (Helliwell and
Hindess, 1999, p. 77; Lukes 1974, pp. 12-13). Foucault’s understanding of power differs significantly from traditional perspectives – Foucault is interested in how power is *exercised* rather than in how it is theoretically constructed. For Foucault, power is not a quantitative object, as he argues:

> Power is never something that someone possesses, any more than it is something that emanates from someone. Power does not belong to anyone or even to a group; there is only power because there is dispersion, relays, networks, reciprocal supports, differences of potential, discrepancies, etcetera. It is in this system of differences, which have to be analyzed, that power can start to function (Foucault, 2006, p. 4).

Likewise, in an interview with Clare O’Farrell in 1981, Foucault said that it is *relations* of power that are everywhere, rather than ‘power’ itself (O’Farrell, 1997, p. 6). In this way, power functions within the *relations* between people, institutions and bodies of knowledge – power is not a ‘thing’ so much as it is a function of these networks, and these systems of relations are where power exists, where it is ‘at play’ (O’Farrell, 1997, p. 6). As Foucault writes, “we need to cut off the King’s head” (Foucault, 1980, p.121), purporting that an understanding of power needs to shift away from a traditional, hierarchical and quantitative view of power as a possession, and towards this *relational* understanding of power as a “complex strategical situation” (Foucault, 2008a p. 93). For example, King George III was able to direct power because the body of knowledge, the discourse, regarding his kingship allowed it as ‘true’ that he possessed or was the director of such power. However, when he became ‘mentally ill’, the discourse regarding his health and the appropriate treatment meant he was no longer able to
direct this power – power was not a possession, but a relation between people and knowledge, or ‘truth’. It serves as an effective example, because King George III was confined to his room where those who cared for him now held relational power over him; so, power is not a possession, but a relation, and it is by the changing relations and discourses that the exercise of power changes (Foucault, 2006, pp. 20-21).

Furthermore, traditional perspectives which view power as something to be possessed fail to recognise power as a productive force. Importantly, Foucault understood power as being productive, rather than as a solely repressive force (Foucault, 2008, p. 94), stating that “power is not bad in itself” (in O’Farrell, 1997, p. 6). In contemporary Western societies, which emphasise individual rights and freedom, power relations are both coercive and productive – that is, power produces individuals who perform particular actions, shapes what people do and what they value, who they take themselves to be, and their practices (Rose, 2000, p. 313). As O’Farrell (2011) writes:

There is a difference between the kind of relationship of power between teacher and student which takes the opportunity to deploy effects of domination and authoritarianism, and the kind which uses mechanisms of power (such as those involved in the transmission of knowledge and assessment) to guide the students’ behaviour and knowledge in useful and helpful ways, while still retaining a respect for the students’ freedom (O’Farrell, 2011, n.p.).
In such a way, Foucault’s notion of power can be understood as being exercised upon free individuals, and when it is exercised it influences their actions and produces particular behaviours and forms of self-concern. Rather than viewing those subjected to technologies of power as being without power themselves, Foucault argues that individuals are free to make choices (particularly in contemporary Western societies), and when power is exercised it influences what these choices are – it influences what behaviours are enacted by its subjects (Hindess, 1996, pp. 99-100; Rose, 1999, p. 95). In this sense, Foucaultian power can be described as the ‘structure of actions’ – the instruments, technologies and procedures – that bears upon the free individual, and which produces forms of behaviour (Hindess, 1996, p. 100).

Power is also productive in that it produces forms of knowledge, and power can only be properly understood through its relation with knowledge. As Foucault writes:

Power produces knowledge…power and knowledge directly imply one another…[and] there is no power relation without a correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault 1995, p. 27).

Speaking the ‘truth’ is always produced through discourse and discursive practices – discourses and their related practices are ‘games of truth’, movements and resistances which produce systems of thought (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; Foucault, 1990, p. 8). Foucault is not interested in what is true or not true, since
that would be to presume the universality of some truth; rather, Foucault is interested in the ‘games of truth’ which come to produce truths as forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1995, p. 28), and Foucault is also interested in questioning these things that are taken as a given (Foucault, 2008b, pp. 2-3). Foucault’s notion of these ‘games of truth’ shows how the assumption or acceptance that a particular body of knowledge is ‘true’ facilitates relations and regimes of power. For example, the acceptance of the psychiatric bodies of knowledge as ‘true’ facilitates the power of these regimes: it is in the ‘games of truth’, the acceptance of ‘truth’, that regimes are given power. In such a way, psychiatric institutions are facilitated to categorise and produce knowledge about subjects and recommend and enact particular medical interventions. In such a way, ‘games of truth’ lead to the facilitation of relations of power, and thus power and knowledge are intimately linked within discourse (Foucault, 1995, pp. 27-28).

Foucaultian power also differs from the traditional notion of power in that it presupposes the capacity of the individual to act, to resist, and this resistance is key in power relations (Foucault, 2008a, p. 95; Rose, 1999, p. 95). Firstly, forms of knowledge, and the categories of subjects that they create, are taken to be universal, are assumed to be ‘true’. However, since these forms of categorisation are historically contingent and not ‘innate’ categories (whether they be categories such as ‘sexually deviant, ‘mentally ill’, and so on), they eventually reveal themselves as contingent as the bodies of knowledge change, and thus the categorisations are resisted as not universal. That is, subjects who are categorised by forms of knowledge and power can, and often do, resist these categorisations as not universal; (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 50; Rose, 1999, p. 95). For
example, homosexuality was once categorised as a mental disorder within the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, a psychiatric manual containing all ‘known’ (or rather, *accepted*) mental disorders and their criteria for diagnosis (Silverstein, 2009, p. 161). However, through the resistance by subjects of this categorisation, this ‘truth’, and the discursive knowledge informing the categorisation, was revealed as ‘incorrect’, as ‘disallowed’, and it was ‘declassified’ as a mental disorder (Silverstein, 2009, p. 161). Certainly, within various forms of scientific discourse there are often resistances to ‘truths’, and these resistances are ongoing relations that further produce forms of knowledge. In this way, it can be seen that Foucaultian power is characterised by the relations and resistances that occur between a variety of actors, institutions and bodies of knowledge. Power exists in the relations, techniques and resistances employed by individuals and institutions, and it does not exist outside these relations as something to be possessed – “there is no ‘escaping’ it” (Foucault, 2008a, p. 95).

**Archaeology and Genealogy**

Foucault’s analytical approach is historical in nature, but shifts away from traditional period-based history, selecting a particular problem and exploring and analysing the various and changing discourses of which that problem is a part (Foucault, 1972, pp. 9-10). Fundamental to Foucault’s approach is to allow investigation to surprise us, and also to realise that, given the innovative nature of discourse, history does not stop. Further, the current state of things within a particular domain of reference is considered more haphazard in its production, rather than being the result of teleological
development leading to a final ‘true’ state of things – that is, history is not so much teleological as it is haphazard, or the result of any number of potential contingencies (Foucault, 1972, p. 5; Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 22-23). Further, Foucault regards history as continuously changing, overlapping and being constantly retold, rather than as a unified object (Foucault, 1972, p. 9).

Foucault uses the methods of archaeology and genealogy (with genealogy being an extension or successor to archaeology) to perform his analyses of the history of systems of thought. Foucault’s approach is a ‘general’ history, as opposed to a ‘total’ history. While a ‘total history’ is “one that seeks to reconstitute the overall form of a civilization, the principle… of a society… - what is called metaphorically a ‘face’ of a period” (Foucault, 1972, p. 9), and which views history as unified and ‘total’, a ‘general history’ is one that concentrates on describing differences, transformations and continuities (Foucault, 1972, pp. 9-10). Both archaeology and genealogy are methods which analyse the discursive statement as it occurs ‘in the archive’ – that is, Foucault is interested in describing discourse as it is, seeking to provide no more than a description of regularities, differences and so on without interpretation or making judgements of ‘deeper’ meanings (Foucault, 1972, p. 10). Foucault seeks to describe the archive and identify “the rules of its formation in discourse itself” (Foucault, 1972, p. 79). Likewise, Foucault’s approach focuses on the statements themselves (both practices and texts), rather than on the authors of those statements, and without seeking to source meaning from human beings. In this way, Foucault explores discourses as they appear, without moving to ‘deeper’ levels, such as cognition and
psychology, or an external ‘reality’ – Foucault explores the *surface*, since that
is where discourse exists (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 25-26).

When Foucaultian archaeology is applied, it focuses its gaze entirely upon
statements as they appear within the archive, and so uncovers the nature of
the discourses within that specific domain of reference (Foucault, 1972, p.
131). In doing so, the archaeological method attempts to describe the relations
between what is practiced and what is said (between the visible and the
sayable) – in this way, the analysis uncovers the varying ways in which the
knowledges of a discourse are composed of both the sayable and of practices.
Moreover, archaeological analysis uncovers the relation between one
statement and another, as well as the ways in which a discourse is organised
and in what ways, by what rules, and in what ‘surfaces of emergence’ it is
produced (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 26-27). For example, Foucault’s
analysis in *The Use of Pleasure* (1990) (Volume 2 of *The History of
Sexuality*) explores the ways in which particular procedures are used by
church authorities and the ways in which these inform and produce further
discursive material and practices in an organised and repeatable way, such as
sexual interdictions and their appearance in texts and sermons, and the
practices which result (Foucault, 1990, pp. 10-13). Furthermore, the
archaeological analysis may describe the ways in which a discourse
constructs and maintains the positions between subjects (or, people) in
regards to those statements. That is, it focuses on the ways in which
statements produce particular positions or ways of being (subjectification),
such as ‘insane’, ‘priest’ or ‘sexual deviant’, which are ways of being that
exist *only* within the framework of a specific discourse (or discourses) (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, pp. 26-27). The analysis that a researcher conducts may not necessarily cover every archaeological aspect of some discourse, but will be focused on the specific ‘problem’ in mind.

Genealogy, as an extension of the archaeological method, is composed of many, if not all, of the aspects of archaeology. Foucault borrowed the term from Nietzsche, but Foucaultian genealogy is different (Foucault, 1986a). On top of the components of the archaeological method, a genealogy is also concerned with the analysis of power, focusing on the origins and functions of some issue or discursive formations, such as Foucault does in his analyses of psychiatry, and sexuality in its different forms (Kendall & Wickham, 1999, p. 29). Foucault viewed modern philosophy (mostly since Kant) as being in two distinct camps; on the one hand, there are those who are dedicated to the ‘analytics of truth’ (Foucault, 1988c, p. 95), who attempt to find the essential rationality in the Enlightenment (Foucault, 1986b, p. 43). On the other hand, there are those who are concerned with the ‘ontology of ourselves’ (Foucault, 1988c, p. 95), who operate within a ‘framework’ of uncertainty and who attempt to limit their imposition of judgement on what they analyse, and who see humans as “beings who are historically determined” (Foucault, 1986b, p. 43). Foucault regards the genealogical method as being one which is concerned with the ‘ontology of ourselves’, aiming to ‘flush out’ the assumptions of certain ‘truths’ that exist within discourse (Foucault, 1986b, p. 43). It differs from archaeology in that it pays particular attention to the processes of change, and of continuation, that exist within discourse – while
archaeology is interested in a particular ‘historical slice’, genealogy is
interested in historical processes and transformations (Kendall and Wickham,
1999, pp. 30-31).

Foucault’s approach comes from a position of not presuming ‘truths’ as given
(Foucault, 1986b, p. 43), essentially arguing that we cannot use our rationality
and frameworks for understanding the world as our tools for analysing the
world. That is, we cannot use the discourses in which we find ourselves
embedded as the tools for analysing the social world, since these frameworks
are historically contingent and changing. We would be misled to use them as
lenses for judging or interpreting the world, and any analyses we would make
would show more about the discourses in which we operate than the problem
itself. Foucault argues that the purpose of his approach is:

To identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or, conversely, the
complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty
calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and
have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the
root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents
(Foucault, 1986, p. 81).

In such a way, Foucaultian analysis of some problem is interested in what the
problem looks like as it appears on the surface, how its discourse is produced
and how it has changed, or continued, over time. In doing so, we can uncover
the problem and the discourses to be seen more clearly, and with keener
perspective. Foucault is not interested in uncovering some objective truth, but
in the ‘games of truth’ which occur within discursive formations, in exploring discourses and bodies of knowledge and in revealing that things are not as self-evident as we take them to be – to reveal that what we presume to be true is, in fact, cultivated within discursive formations and not universal, fundamental or given (Foucault, 1972, p. 127). In such a way, it can be seen that Foucault’s approach to social analysis involves a significant shift from traditional historical approaches. Foucault’s focus is towards the ways in which ‘truths’ are formed, in what ways bodies of knowledge are taken as a given, and how they influence the ways of understanding the world, the self and thus the behaviours which result. Foucault’s approach is widely considered a ‘toolbox’ for researchers to utilise (O’Farrell, 2005, p. 50), and Foucault himself used this toolbox, particularly in his later years, to analyse the self and society – specifically, the techniques of governmentality and the ‘technologies of the self’.

**Foucault’s Approach to the Self and Subjectification**

Foucault regards the transition from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’ as being a process of change of forms of governing from Middle Age forms of discipline and sovereignty (which set limits and constraints) to the modern form of government with the specific end of achieving *stable* populations (1991a; van Krieken, 1990). Further, Foucault regards this transition towards ‘modernity’ as a:

Tendency which, over a long period throughout the West, has steadily led towards the pre-eminence over all other forms (sovereignty,
discipline, etc.) of this type of power… resulting, on the one hand, in
the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses,
and, on the other, in development of a whole complex of *savoirs*
(Foucault, 1991a, pp. 102-103).

For Foucault, *savoirs* refers to the formation of forms of knowledge, to
discursive formations (2010, p. 41). In this way, Foucault argues that there
has been a *process* of change from systems of rule involving Middle Age
forms of sovereignty towards current forms of governmentality (1991a).
Foucault argues that this modern form of government, which he labels
‘governmentality’, refers to all the components that make up a government
that has the maintenance of a stable, contented and well-ordered population as
its end, achieving a sense of wellbeing among the population through a
variety of ‘techniques of the self’ utilising bodies of knowledge (1991a, p.
102).

Further to this, governmentality refers to the ‘art of government’, where
government is understood as encompassing the strategies for ‘the conduct of
conduct’ (Foucault, 1991a; Gordon, 1991, p. 48). In such a way, Foucault is
interested in the range of attempts by authorities of various sorts (such as the
Church, educational institutions, medical practitioners) “to act upon the
actions of others” (Rose, 2000, p. 315), to ‘conduct their conduct’, taking as
their object various things, such as self-realisation, discipline, productivity
and social harmony. In taking this approach, Foucault was then led to focus
on the strategies for the ‘conduct of conduct’ which operate as the
‘technologies of the self’, through which individuals experience themselves, judge themselves, and in doing so ‘conduct their own conduct’ (Foucault, 1988a, p. 19; Rose, 2000, p. 315). Foucault’s work on governmentality marks a shift towards a focus on power and bodies of knowledge as they relate between an individual and themselves as the ‘subject’ (Foucault, 1991a). Foucault argues that governmentality refers to “this contact between technologies of domination of others and those of the self” (Foucault, 1988a, p. 19). In Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality (2008a), Foucault emphasises the ways in which the discourses on sexuality have played a central role in shaping, constricting and delimiting the impulses of humans and the experience of the self as a subject of desire and sexuality – that is, sexuality is taken as a key component of the sense of self, and ways in which subjects conduct themselves are accordingly influenced (Foucault, 2008a). Here, Foucault is interested in technologies and systems of authority through which subjects come to cultivate and experience themselves in a particular way and is therefore concerned with the process of ‘subjectification’ (Foucault, 1986a; 2008a).

In an interview near the end of his life (conducted by RuxMartin), Foucault stated, “Everybody both acts and thinks. The way people act or react is linked with thought, and of course thinking is related to tradition” (in Martin, 1988, p. 14). In his later work, Foucault became interested in how individuals come to constitute themselves as subjects, through techniques of the self. In Volumes 2 and 3 of The History of Sexuality (The Use of Pleasure (1990) and
The Care of the Self (1988b), respectively, Foucault was interested in exploring practices of the self in some detail, and the importance of ‘taking care of oneself’. Foucault wanted to continue his work in this area with further investigation of the practices and techniques through which individuals cultivate their sense of self by acting on their own bodies, feelings, thoughts and conduct in order to reach their ‘true’ selves.

Accordingly, Foucault began to produce a genealogy of subjectification, one that was not solely focused on sex and sexuality (Martin, Gutman and Hutton, 1988, p. 4).

For Foucault, ‘subjectification’ is a term which refers to the processes and practices through which human beings come to relate to themselves as certain sorts of ‘persons’, to view themselves as subjects of a particular sort. A genealogy of subjectification is one that explores the relations which human beings have established with *themselves* – it explores our relation to ourselves and the technical forms that facilitate these relations (Foucault, 1986a; Rose, 2000, p. 311). As such, a genealogy of subjectification focuses on the changing practices and techniques of self-conduct and cultivation of the self (that is, on the changing technologies of the self) (Du Gay, 2007, pp. 42-43).

It is important to note that, in this endeavour, Foucault is not concerned with describing the birth of self-identity or the narrative history of the ‘person’ as a psychological entity in order to examine how different historical periods have produced humans with different psychological characteristics. This would be to presume a particular concept of the ‘person’ (a contemporary conception of
the ‘person’) as a psychologised, individualised and interiorised entity (Du Gay, 2007, p. 43; Rose, 2000, p. 321). Rather, Foucault’s genealogy of subjectification is concerned with examining the diverse and changing (and historically contingent) practices through which individuals cultivate themselves into certain sorts of persons, as subjects (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; Rose, 2000, p. 321).

Our relation with ourselves has assumed its particular form because it has been the object of methods and practices – technologies – that have sought to shape our understandings and conduct within the social world, and with various objectives in mind, such as masculinity, femininity, virtue and pleasure (Rose, 2000, pp. 311-312). As Foucault writes:

Technologies of the self…permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18).

In such a way, technologies of the self are techniques for conducting one’s self, for cultivating and disciplining the self in a particular way and for experiencing oneself accordingly. These techniques are embodied in particular practices (such as confession, diary-keeping and surveillance) and are utilised in such a way that they enable the individual to observe or think of themselves as a particular type of subject and to then ‘conduct their own conduct’ accordingly (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; Rose, 2000, p. 315). Further to
this, and importantly, these sorts of practices and techniques are always conducted within an actual or imagined system of authority that provides a normalising discursive ‘truth’ (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; Rose, 2000, p. 313).

It may appear at first that technology is separate to the domain of human beings (that is, is separate to being a human, and a ‘person’), however, our very experience of ourselves as certain sorts of ‘persons’ is the result of the deployment of various human technologies that take ways of being human (ways of understanding and conducting oneself) as their object. It is important to note that when referring to technologies, Foucault is referring to the assemblage of discourses, techniques, knowledges, languages, instruments, systems of judgements, buildings and spaces of the social world, which are underpinned by an objective or purpose of production of some kind for human beings (whether it be the production of something material or abstract) (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; Rose, 2000, p. 313). For example, the school, hospital and prison can all be regarded as such technologies, which utilise discipline, surveillance and normalising judgements in order to cultivate the self as a certain type of subject – one who is surveyed and who conducts their own conduct (Rose, 2000, p. 313). Here the ‘conduct of conduct’ refers to the ways in which individuals experience, shape, judge and understand themselves as certain sorts of subjects; individuals are subjects of technologies of the self, and these technologies are embodied in particular practices and methods (Gordon, 1991, p. 48; Rose, 2000, p. 315). In his later work, Foucault focused his attention on these technologies of the self, and
utilised his analytical approach, as discussed earlier in the chapter, to explore
the varying ways in which individuals have come to be concerned with and
subjectify themselves (Martin, Gutman and Hutton, 1988, p. 4).

A Genealogy

While there is a contemporary, and somewhat secular and Cartesian, focus on
‘knowing oneself’ in philosophical discourse, the ancient Greeks took the
precept of ‘being concerned with oneself’, of ‘taking care of oneself’, as the
fundamental principle of moral philosophy, and it formed a basis to guide
moral behaviour and conduct (Foucault, 1988a, pp. 20, 22). Foucault’s
*Technologies of the Self* (1998a) provides an excellent example of how he
applied his approach to analysing the self and society, within which he traces
a genealogy of subjectification through technologies of the self. Foucault
identifies that in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates presented himself before his
judges and argued that while they were concerned with the acquisition of
power and wealth, he was concerned not only with ‘being concerned with
himself’, but with continually inviting citizens to *occupy themselves with
themselves* (a task which he would not abandon except with his “last breath”) (Foucault, 1988a, p. 21). Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatise *On Virginity,*
described the importance of ‘shining the light’ in every corner of ‘one’s
house’, and in every corner of ‘one’s soul’. In concerning oneself with one’s
soul, one would recover the *true* essence of their soul, which had been
tarnished by their body (Foucault, 1988a, p. 21). Epicurus, in his first text to
serve as a guide of morals, *Letter to Menoeceus*, wrote that one should philosophise on one’s own soul both when one is young and when one is old, and that this task should be carried out throughout one’s lifetime; Epicurus organised teachings about everyday life around the precept of taking care of oneself, for the purpose of ‘mutual salvation’ (Foucault, 1988a, p. 22). These hermeneutic examples show that moral philosophy in antiquity was focused on the concern for and care of the self, and that concerning oneself with oneself was to be a *constant practice* – that is, subjectification of the self was to be continually practiced. In such a way, it can be seen that Foucault utilises his approach, as discussed earlier in the chapter, to explore the ways in which subjectification has occurred in antiquity.

Foucault elaborates on this philosophical concern with taking care of oneself by exploring Plato’s *Alcibiades I*, a text involving a dialogue between the ambitious Alcibiades and Socrates. While the text is considered to not be an actual account of an interaction between Alcibiades and Socrates, the ‘truth’ of the text is not as important as is the significance that the Neopolatonists in the third and fourth centuries gave to the text (Foucault, 1988a, p. 23). The Neopolatonists organised Plato’s texts as a pedagogy and as a source of knowledge, placing *Alcibiades I* first in the collection and giving it primacy as a source of education; thus, it was a significant text in informing discursive truths about morality, conduct and self. Significantly, the first and core principle of *Alcibiades I* is the importance of the care of the self (Foucault, 1988a, p. 23). In the dialogue, Alcibiades wishes to become a powerful
political figure, but Socrates argues that Alcibiades knows very little, especially when compared to his Persian and Spartan rivals. Socrates tells Alcibiades that, in order to be competitive with his rivals, Alcibiades must ‘take care of himself’. Here, the concern for the self refers to a real activity and practice of being concerned and ‘taking pains’ with one’s health and one’s education (Foucault, 1988a, p. 24). Further to this, Socrates helps Alcibiades to see that taking care of the self does not mean taking care of one’s body as such, but of the principle which uses the body: the soul. In this way, the principle activity of the care of the self is to care for one’s own soul. In order to do this, Socrates and Alcibiades conclude that one must continually examine one’s soul (Foucault, 1988a, p. 26). Importantly, in uncovering this example, Foucault is concerned with the ways in which bodies of knowledge have been established and developed, and in showing how they impact on individuals’ behaviours and sense of self through the process of subjectification, and through the practices and techniques of the self.

One of the significant practices through which this care of the self was facilitated or conducted was through writing. In order to ‘take care of themselves’, people would write letters to themselves to be reread later, as well as write letters to others to help them with themselves and writing about their own ‘selves’ to others (Foucault, 1988a, p. 27). Foucault provides Marcus Aurelius as a clear example of this – in a letter he wrote to his friend Fronto, Aurelius wrote about the ‘unimportant’ everyday activities and
thoughts he conducted during one particular day, including a ‘chat’ he had with his mother, thoughts on his relations with Fronto, and how he slept poorly that night due to illness. In this letter, Foucault argues, Aurelius is concerned with self-analysis, with how he felt and what he thought – it is a clear example of the practice of the cultivation of the self through the technique of writing (Foucault, 1988a, p. 29).

Christianity, in both its early and contemporary forms, is a religion concerned with salvation of the soul, which must be obtained through acceptance of and alignment with an imposed set of conditions and rules of conduct (Foucault, 1988a, p. 40). The duty of a follower to accept a set of obligations involves the acceptance of a set of discursive truths, along with acceptance of the authority of the institutionalised Church. Furthermore, Christianity is a religion which requires its followers to know what is occurring inside them, to acknowledge faults and to disclose any temptations, desires or sins either to God or to an other through confession. Only by doing this, in confessing one’s inner state, either in public or in private, is one able to purify their soul – self-analysis and care of the self is essential. The expression of one’s inner state, of their self, is a mark of ‘truth’ and it ought to be practised actively and continually (Foucault, 1988a, p. 40). In such a way, a member of the Christian religion is obligated to practice self-care, resulting in the cultivation of the self as a certain sort of ‘person’ who follows the moral code expected of them and, in doing so, ‘conducts their own conduct’.
In *The History of Sexuality* (particularly volumes 2 and 3), Foucault explores how an ‘experience’ of ‘sexuality’ came to be constituted in society, where ‘experience’ is the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture. One of the key elements of the series was Foucault’s analysis of the practices by which individuals were led to focus on themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between ‘themselves and themselves’ a certain relationship that allows them to discover their ‘true’ self (Foucault, 1990, p. 5). That is to say, part of Foucault’s work in the series was concerned with the practices by which people cultivated their self as a *subject* of sexuality. A brief exploration of this form of subjectivity will help illustrate how technologies of the self result in subjects conducting their own conduct – in this case in reference to a Christian moral code.

Sexuality as an ethical concern appears at certain times in the Christian tradition to be of more importance than other ‘essential’ ethical concerns, being the subject of various and strict interdictions, the transgression of which is a serious ethical and religious offence (Foucault, 1990, p. 5). Religious discourses, including religious texts, served as functional devices that enabled individuals to watch over and shape their own conduct, and shape themselves as ethical *subjects*. In such a way, the moral codes set out by the religious discourses, including the strict interdictions governing behavioural
expectations, formed knowledge of appropriate ethical and religious behaviour for members of the Church (Foucault, 1990, pp. 10-13). For example, Foucault argues that the discourses had a persistence of themes which problematised particular forms of conduct and idealised others: a general sense of fear and anxiety was present in regards to sexual activity as a form of pleasure; such behaviour was considered to lead to illness, harm to offspring, and harm to the entirety of humankind, as well as having negative effects on the soul and life of the individual (a fear which also existed in antiquity). Unfaithfulness was strongly regarded as dishonourable and sinful in both ancient philosophy and contemporary (and early) Christian discourse, while monogamy is expected. The common 19th century image of the homosexual man was a stigmatised and negative one, through which homosexuality was problematised as transgressive; and the image of the abstinent and self-restrained self was regarded as a noble and an ideal mode of conduct (Foucault, 1990, pp. 15-20). In this way, the moral codes set out by the Christian tradition are a set of values and rules of action that are recommended and imposed through institutional forms, such as the family, the education system and the Church. This is not only a moral code, but it is also real behaviour – that is, the moral code, as the embodiment of a technology of the self, provides the individual with the manner in which they ought to conduct themselves, and it acts as an imagined (or actual) system of authority that provides a normalising discursive ‘truth’ (Foucault, 1990, pp. 25-26). In such a way, the Christian self is one who subjectifies himself or herself as an ethical subject, and is one who conducts their own conduct.
Subjectification is a term that refers to the practices and processes by which human beings come to understand and think of themselves as certain sorts of ‘persons’, as subjects of a particular kind. A genealogy of subjectification is one that explores the ways in which technologies of the self – techniques and practices of cultivating the self in a particular way – have developed and changed through history (Du Gay, 2007, p. 42; Rose, 2000, pp. 311-312). In the ancient Greco-Roman philosophical discourses, ‘taking care of oneself’ was a primary moral concern. This concern was practiced in various ways, an important example of which is the act of writing about one’s self. Through this practice, individuals would analyse their self in detail, and in doing so cultivate their self as a particular sort of subject (Foucault, 1988a, p. 29).

Christianity is a religion that is concerned with the salvation of the soul, which can only be obtained through acceptance of and alignment with an imposed set of conditions and rules of conduct, including the requirement to have knowledge of the inner workings of the soul. In such a way, and through practices such as confession, the Christian person was cultivated as a certain type of subject who conducted their own conduct according to moral obligations (Foucault, 1990, pp. 25-26).

This chapter has introduced the key concepts and methods developed and utilised by Foucault, and which operate as a ‘toolbox’ for a variety of researchers. It has been shown that Foucault regards the self as developing within our relation with ourselves, and a relation which has assumed its particular form because it has been the subject of the methods and practices
that have sought to shape our understandings and conduct within the social world, which has resulted in the cultivation of the self as a certain sort of subject who conducts their own conduct. This chapter has explored Foucault’s approach and arguments regarding the self and society, and shown how Foucault utilises his approach to explore the historical contingencies of the self.
CHAPTER 2 – Elias’ Approach to the Self and Society

This chapter will explore Elias’ approach and arguments regarding the self and society; firstly, I will turn to Elias’ approach to sociological inquiry, aiming to show how he stepped away from traditional historical accounts which view the self as *homo clausus* – the ‘enclosed self’ – to utilise an approach focusing on the processes of change of ‘figurations’, where he focused on the changing networks of interdependencies among human beings (Du Gay, 2007, pp. 25-26; Mennell, 2012). The chapter will then explore Elias’ arguments regarding the ‘civilising process’ and his account of the self. Overall, this chapter aims to provide the reader with an understanding of Elias’ approach and some of his arguments regarding the self and the ‘civilising processes’, showing how his approach also provides some useful arguments regarding the self and society.

On ‘Homo Clausus’ and Figurations

In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), Elias shows the processes by which the structure of Western society has changed over time, and how the notion and experience of self and their related forms of behaviour have changed over time (Elias, 2000, p. xi). In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), Elias argues that there has been an assumption of dualism in the relationship between ‘society’ and the ‘person’ – that philosophical and historical discussions assume that ‘society’ and the ‘individual’ are fundamentally distinct and pre-formed.
objects, with a clear line between them, in which the forces of one determine the other (Elias, 2000, p. 469; Du Gay, 2007, p. 23). Elias identifies the image of the person as:

An entirely free, independent being, a ‘closed personality’ inwardly quite self-sufficient and separate from all other people, has behind it a long tradition in the development of European societies (Elias, 2000, p. 470).

It has been assumed that, on the one hand, ‘persons’, who are ‘closed off’ in relation to the societies they are part of, and ‘societies’ on the other, are two separate and distinct phenomena, rather than being seen as two aspects of the same being (Elias, 2000, p. 469). For example, Parsons argues that there is ‘interpenetration’ between the individual actor and the social system, yet this in itself shows that this approach places a clear distinction between the individual and society as two separate objects, despite the so-called ‘interpenetration’ – that is, while the ‘individual’ is influenced by ‘society’, and ‘society’ is influenced by different ‘individuals’, they are still taken to be two quite distinct entities (Elias, 2000, pp. 469-470). While dichotomies have shown to be useful for understanding the world in many fields of sociology (such as distinctions between ethnic groups, or distinctions between males and females), as well as other disciplines, Elias argues that this notion of dualism between ‘society’ and ‘persons’ obstructs our understanding of the processes of change over time of both the self and ‘society’, since the individual and society are fundamentally two aspects of the same being (Elias, 2000, p. 470; Du Gay, 2007, p. 23).
Elias argues that there is an assumption of the ‘enclosed human’, an image of the human in general, which is a:

Conception of the individual as *homo clausus*, a little world in himself [or herself] who ultimately exists quite independently of the great world outside…. His [or her] core, his [or her] being, his [or her] true self appears likewise as something divided within him [or her] by an invisible wall from everything outside, including every other human being (Elias, 2000, p. 472).

In this way, *homo clausus* is an assumption of the self as completely enclosed, separate and static. The approach of the individual as *homo clausus* is problematic because there is a rigid barrier between the human being on one hand, and the social world ‘outside’ (Elias, 2000, p. 472). Thus, Elias argues that it is not justified to place a sharp dividing line between the ‘inside’ of the ‘enclosed person’ and the ‘external’ societal world as the foundation of sociological thinking: so long as individuals are viewed as ‘enclosed’, society can only be understood as nothing more than a collection of separate, static *hominès clausi* (Elias, 2000, p. 480). To view humans as a collection of separate and distinct *hominès clausi* “obstructs [our] understanding of the long-term processes which people undergo on both the individual and social planes” (Elias, 2000, p. 470). In this way, Elias’ view of the social world, and his conception of what the self is, involves an attempt to shift from traditional perspectives.
As such, Elias was critical of traditional “Western philosophy, and of the hold which it continued to have... over sociologists’ modes of thinking” (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 33), and he strongly opposed the notion of *homo clausus* as a theme throughout modern philosophy (Elias, 2000, p. 474). Elias argues that this conception has had “an extraordinary persistence” (Elias, 2000, pp. 474-475) and recurs throughout much of modern philosophy, particularly noting the works of Descartes and Kant (2000, p. 475). For Elias, it is around the time of the ‘Renaissance’ and onwards that the basic philosophical form of the self – the way of identifying the human as *homo clausus* that is still pervasive today – developed in a number of societies to the point where it is now taken as a given (Elias, 1991, p. 98).

To take Descartes as an example, the French philosopher, in his well-known *Meditations*, questions the very existence of the ‘outside’ world, and what we perceive and sense. Descartes uses a thought experiment in which he imagines that his perception and sense experiences are being deceived by a demon, and therefore he cannot take anything he perceives with his senses to be true or real (since what he sees, hears, feels, tastes and smells could be, and he must assume is, a deception), and also assumes that his memory tells him lies – a frame of thought known as Cartesian scepticism (Descartes, 2000, p. 156). Descartes concludes “*cogito, ergo sum*” – “I think; therefore I am” (Descartes, 2000, p. 152). That is, Descartes argues that the demon may
mislead him as much as the demon wishes, but the demon cannot reduce
Descartes to being nothing, concluding that as long as he thinks something, as
long as thought is present, Descartes must exist – the presence of thought is
taken as the evidence of Descartes’ existence (Descartes, 156). In this way,
Descartes proposed a conception of human beings as isolated subjects,
“thinking away inside their own containers” (Mennell, 1989, p. 189). While
Elias does not contest Descartes’ Meditations themselves, he points out that
this misleading notion of the self as homo clausus has developed historically,
and is problematic in sociological inquiry.

The homo clausus, as ‘a thinking statue’ (static, separate and distinct from
others and the social world), can view and interpret the social world, but is
still divided from it – there is still an invisible wall that denies their capacity
to truly interact (Elias, 1991, p. 117). “They look from outside into a world or
from inside out into a world – however one chooses to put it – a world which
is always separate to them” (Elias, 1991, p. 118). While this may be
experienced as authentic, Elias argues that this conception of homo clausus
“gives a misleading twist to our ideas on the relation of person to person,
individual to society” (Elias, 1991, p. 118). Elias then points out that this
experience and notion of homo clausus is not universal, but historically
contingent – dependent upon the specific “situation and particular make-up of
people in specific societies” (Elias, 1991, p. 118). In such a way, Elias argues
that a modern philosopher has a strong tendency to “take up his [or her]
position ‘in’ the single individual. He [or she] looks through his [or her] eyes
at the world ‘outside’ as if through small windows; or he [or she] meditates from the same standpoint on what is happening ‘within’” (Elias, 1991, p. 119).

Instead, Elias aims to take a different ‘starting-point’ (2000, p. 474), and argues that there is no inside and outside within the human world, and that ‘society’ and the self are fundamentally one and the same (Elias, 2000, p. 480). Elias offers an alternative way of understanding the relationship between society and the ‘person’, using the term *figurations* to refer to “the network of interdependencies among human beings” (Elias, 2000, pp. 481-482), and argues that this is what binds humans together. As Elias writes:

> The image of man as a ‘closed personality’ is here replaced by the image of man as an ‘open personality’ who possesses a greater or lesser degree of relative (but never absolute and total) autonomy vis-à-vis other people and who is, in fact, fundamentally oriented toward and dependent on other people throughout his life. The network of interdependencies among human beings is what binds them together (Elias, 2000, pp. 481-482).

Elias proposes this alternative to *homo clausus* as being *homines aperti* – the ‘open person’. In this way, humans only exist as pluralities – that is, societies of humans are pluralities of humans – and thus to think of them as separate and individualised is obstructive and misleading. Elias, through his term *figurations*, urges us to think of society neither as an abstract set of attributes
of a grouping of individuals, nor as a structural system separate from or beyond individuals. Rather, society is to be understood as a network of interdependent humans, as figurations of human beings (Elias, 2000, p. 482). Furthermore, these figurations are formed and change over time, they are processes, and this is essential to Elias’ approach to the self and the ‘civilising processes’ (Du Gay, 2007, p. 26).

Elias argues that it may be helpful in some ways to take the ‘traditional’ perspective to analysing history and the social world, and that “it is no doubt fruitful and even indispensable to see history in this way, as a mosaic of individual actions of individual people”, since it is the “individual agents and their various actions that we see” (2000, p. 188). Elias argues that “on the one hand, we might enquire how this or that man gained power”, while “on the other, we may ask… which social structure, which development of human relations…” and which processual changes have led to the institution of the king or prince to sustain itself, as an example (2000, p. 188). Elias then points out that analysing the processual changes in figurations – in the interdependent social networks – provides the capacity to explore the ‘civilizing processes’ over long periods of time (Elias, 2000, p. 188). In this way, Elias is interested in the process of changes in social figurations, in the networks of interdependencies themselves (Elias, 2000, p. 481; Van Krieken, 1990).
As Stephen Mennell (1989, p. 199) puts forward, Elias’ approach to sociological analysis involves the understanding that the world, including the ‘social world’, is in a process of constant change and movement. In this way, Elias’ approach is often referred to as ‘figurational sociology’ and ‘process sociology’ – that is, that an appropriate analysis of the social world will explore the changing processes of the “connections between power, behaviour, emotions and knowledge in (to a greater or lesser extent) long-term perspective” (Mennell, 2012). Elias emphasises the importance of looking at processes of change within figurations, explaining that there is often an unhelpful tendency in sociological research to reduce processes to static states: “The process – the individual human being as a process in growing up, human beings together as a process in the development of mankind – is reduced in thought to a state” (Elias, 2000, p. 471). An example Elias gives is that “we say, ‘The wind is blowing’, as if the wind were separate from its blowing, as if a wind could exist which did not blow’ (1978, p. 112). In this way, Elias is concerned with the long-term processes of change within human figurations, rather than in defining and analysing static social states. Further, as Goudsblom points out, the key areas of focus of Elias’ approach, and process sociology in general, are that humans are plural and interdependent, that the figurations they exist within are constantly changing and moving, that the processual changes in human figurations (in history) are mostly unplanned or haphazard, and that knowledge itself is developed within figurations (1977, pp. 6, 105). In such a way, interdependence and process are fundamental in Elias’ approach (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 36).
In process sociology, individuals’ identities, interests and objectives are variable and fluctuate with the form and dynamics of the relationships between those individuals – forms of behaviour and a sense of self are acquired “in conjunction with other people, from the structure of society in which the individual grows up” (Elias, 1991, p. 36). In this way, it can be seen that figurations do not connect people with already-existing forms of personhood and behaviour, but rather their characteristics and dimensions are acquired through the networks of interdependent humans they are a part of – the characteristics and actions of a person are dependent on, and inseparable from, the relations in which they are involved (Elias, 2000, p. 481). In this way, social relations and the sense of self are interdependent, and the ‘person’ is a fundamental part of the figurations in which they are involved. (Du Gay, 2007, p. 26). Therefore, in order to understand the self, it is essential to look at the location or context in which they are placed within the changing figurations. These forms of personhood and behaviour, as with the figurations they are attributed to, go through a continuous process of change over time, and so in order to fully understand a particular form of self within a certain context, it is essential to explore those particular figurations and the purposes they serve, as well as gain an understanding of the historical context of those figurations and in what ways they have changed over time (Du Gay, 2007, p. 26; Strauss, 1977, p. 164). By utilising this figurational approach in The Civilizing Process, Elias explores the ways in which the structure of Western society has changed over time, and also how the sense of self and forms of behaviour have changed over time (Elias, 2000, p. xi).
The Civilising of the Self

In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias explores “how and why in the course of history the structure of Western society continuously changes, and… at the same time… why, in the same areas, the standard of behaviour and the psychical habits of Western peoples change” (Elias, 2000, p. xi). In this way, Elias utilises his ‘process sociology’ approach to explore how the sense of self and related behaviours developed and changed as the result of changing figurations; Elias argues that there has been a long-term process of growing ‘pacification’ and self-control in Europe since the early Middle Ages (Smith, 2001, p. 21).

Elias argues that contemporary society in the West is characterised by a degree of monopolisation, including a monopoly of military force and finances (as well as taxation), whereby both reinforce one another and facilitate the maintenance of the monopolisation. This monopolisation of what Elias terms ‘authority’ facilitates the centralised administration, known as the ‘state’ (Elias, 2000, p. 268). In *The Civilizing Process* (2000), Elias’ argument is that there has been a long-term process in the West since the early Middle Ages of a growing ‘pacification’ and self-restraint, and that prior to this there was no centralised system of government. Society was characterised by frequent violent struggles for local authority, with ‘top-down’ authority being loose and fragmented, and there was no consistent
pressure by authorities upon individuals to constrain these violent tendencies – authority was ‘decentralised’ (Elias, 2000, p. xii; Smith, 2001, pp. 21, 23). Elias describes how, over time, there has been a processual change towards the monopolisation of authority of the ‘state’. Elias writes, describing as an example of struggles for local authority:

One group is victorious and gains control of the power chances of the vanquished; a still smaller number of people controls a still greater number of power chances; a still greater number of people are eliminated from free competition; and the process is repeated until finally, in the extreme case, one individual controls all power chances and all the others are dependent on him (Elias, 2000, p. 269).

Elias notes that, historically, it is usually large associations of people that hold the monopoly of authority, which come to form ‘states’, rather than one individual (Elias, 2000, pp. 269-270). In this way, Elias argues that systems of authority and administration – ‘states’ – became more centralised and stable over time; importantly, part of this increasing stabilisation meant a need by the state to facilitate a stable population that was not prone to violent outbursts or impulses, and thus more centralised controls were utilised to ‘pacify’ the populations, and to move towards being more ‘civilised’ (Smith, 2001, p. 23).

For Elias, ‘civilisation’ refers to the expression of “the self-consciousness of the West… It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or ‘more primitive’ contemporary ones” (Elias, 2000, p. 5). In such a way, Elias points out that he
does not take his work on the ‘civilising processes’ to be a judgement of some ‘improvement’ of society over time, or that being ‘civilised’ is ‘better’ than being ‘uncivilised’. Rather, Elias is interested in analysing these changes over time from what is called the ‘uncivilised’ towards the ‘civilised’, and how ‘civilisation’ has come to be taken as ‘superior’ (Ritzer, 2000, p. 509). As van Krieken writes:

> What we experience as ‘civilization’ is founded on a particular habitus, a particular psychic structure which has changed over time, and which can only be understood in connection with changes in the forms taken by broader social relationships (van Krieken, 1998, p. 91).

What Elias calls ‘habitus’ refers to individuals’ ‘personality makeup’, to those parts of our personality makeup which are not fundamental or given, but ‘habituated’ and learned deeply since birth, and which are developed as a result of the networks of interdependencies in which we are involved and ‘grow up’ in (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, pp. 15, 43). Mennell and Goudsblom (1998, p. 15) argue that habitus guides behaviour, while also being continually formed within changing social figurations. In such a way, Elias argues that the long-term changes in state formation towards the more ‘civilised’ is closely connected with the changing forms of human habitus and behaviours, and Elias aims to demonstrate this in *The Civilizing Process*, utilising specific and ‘concrete’ data in his analysis (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 15).

Elias argues that the ‘civilised’ habitus is one that is self-restrained and controlled, and it first became present in the noble courts (Smith, 2001, p.
As richer, and more centralised, feudal estates slowly formed, the ‘warrior class’ formed an upper stratum which attended court and developed what Elias calls *courtois*, and later *civilité*, forms of behaviour – standards of how one should behave in the presence of others, and of how one should restrain their impulses (Elias, 2000, p. xii; Smith, 1999, p. 80). Elias writes that “behaviour moves very perceptibly towards the standard that we denote today by a derivative of the word *civilité* as ‘civilized’ behaviour” (Elias, 2000, p. xii). Elias analyses a guide written in 1530 by Erasmus of Rotterdam on how one should behave, known as *De civilitate morum puerilium* (‘On civility in boys’). Elias cites Erasmus’ text as the starting-point of this concept of *civilité* as ‘civilised’ behaviour – the treatise was widely circulated in a variety of translations across Europe and was socially accepted as a guide on behaviour (Elias, 2000, p. 47). Erasmus’ treatise serves as an instruction for noble boys on how to ‘outwardly’ present themselves, and to take concern for their bodily ‘propriety’, covering areas such as the appropriate way to carry oneself, gestures, dress, facial expressions and how to blow one’s nose (Elias, 2000, p. 49). Elias also utilises a variety of other ‘manners books’ from the late Middle Ages to the Victorian period, noting how these manners change over time (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 15). Further, as these forms of behaviour became deeply habituated, they came to form the habitus of the members of society – that is, they came to be internalised, and functioned as a part of the personality makeup of subjects without a ‘second thought’ (Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 16).
Elias notes that the ‘civilising process’ “is a change of human conduct and sentiment in a quite specific direction” (Elias, 2000, p. 365) – a direction towards more ‘civilised’ behaviour, whereby there is a ‘social constraint towards self-constraint’ and the tendency to restrain one’s impulses (2000, p. 365). Elias argues that societies with more stable and centralised systems of authority involve longer chains of interdependencies, and the individual is protected from attack in violent struggles for local authority (since these occur less frequently, if at all). In parallel, the individual is also compelled to restrain themselves and to suppress any impulses towards violence in order to maintain this stability (Elias, 2000, p. 370). It is also in the individual’s best interest to restrain themselves from their impulses. As Elias argues:

The more threatened is the social existence of the individual who gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions, the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects, and the more strongly is each individual constrained from an early age to take account of the effects of his or her own or other people’s actions on a whole series of links in the social chain (Elias, 2000, p. 370).

In such a way, the networks of interdependencies influence the sense of self, resulting in an individual who restrains their impulses for the sake of their own social existence – that is, the subject is one who is compelled to conduct themselves in the appropriate manner through self-restraint, who is compelled to control themselves according to social expectations, and who takes on these expectations and behaviours as a part of their habitus (Elias, 2000, p. 370). In such a way, Elias shows in The Civilising Process that there has been a process of change towards monopolisation of authority, and that this has
been closely linked with the development of the ‘civilised’ habitus as a result of the social constraint towards self-constraint (Smith, 2001, p. 23).

This chapter has discussed Elias’ figurational sociology approach and his criticism of the notion of the self as *homo clausus*. Further, this chapter has explored Elias’ approach and arguments regarding the self and society, particularly within what he calls the ‘civilising processes’. It has been demonstrated how Elias’ approach and arguments are useful for understanding and analysing the self and society, with the purpose of providing an introduction to Elias’ work and a foundation for further discussion in Chapter Three regarding the similarities and convergence in Elias’ approach with Foucault’s.
CHAPTER 3 – Comparing Foucault and Elias

This chapter will demonstrate some of the similarities and differences present in the works of Foucault and Elias, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, respectively. Further, I will argue that there is some convergence between the two approaches taken by Foucault and Elias, and that Elias’ work can offer some benefits to a Foucaultian approach.

Both Elias and Foucault undermine the notion of *homo clausus* (Smith, 1999, p. 82). Elias’ work aims to show how the figurations within which one exists fundamentally determine the self – the self is inseparable from the figurations within which they operate (Elias, 2000, p. 481). While Elias quite explicitly addresses this issue of *homo clausus*, and Foucault does not, it is still present in Foucault’s work. Foucault’s work, as discussed in Chapter One, begins from a starting point of the “decision that universals do not exist” (Foucault, 2008b, p.3). In such a way, Foucault’s analysis of the self involves not presuming the self as a given, but to explore how it has developed through historical contingencies. For Foucault, the sense of self and the resulting behaviours are formed within discursive practices – the self is not ‘closed off’, but determined and experienced *within* discursive formations and practices (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18). That is to say, in Foucault’s work the modern self is penetrated by the ‘technologies of the self’ – discursive formations and practices penetrate the self and it is within these techniques and their related bodies of knowledge that the self is cultivated and the human
is encouraged to have concern for the self (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18). In such a way, Foucault also undermines *homo clausus*, since Foucault’s ‘subject’ is fundamentally a part of the discursive formations and practices and not ‘closed off’.

There is also some similarity in Elias’ and Foucault’s approaches and criticisms of history and philosophy. Elias’ emphasis on the processual changes within human figurations is essential to his approach, and he regards it as a significant shift from traditional forms of history and philosophy, of which he is significantly critical (Elias, 1991, p. 98; 2000, p. 481). Elias argues that it is worthwhile to focus on the *processes* of the changing figurations, and argues against the traditional approaches of understanding society as a collection of static and separate individuals (Elias, 2000, p. 471). In a similar way (as discussed in Chapter One), Foucault’s understanding of history is significantly different to traditional forms and he also argues against the tendency within modern philosophy and history to view history as a single, unified object. Foucault is critical of the traditional historical approach, which assumes history to be a sort of teleological development leading to a final ‘true’ state of things. Rather, Foucault argues that history is far more haphazard in its development and is full of contingencies, being in a process of continuously shifting and overlapping (as well as being continually ‘retold’) (Foucault 1972, pp. 3, 5, 9-10). In this way, both scholars emphasise the importance of history as an *ongoing process*, and argue against the
tendency to view history as having some final ‘true’ and static state or as being comprised of static objects and individuals.

Further, there is some similarity in the ways in which Elias and Foucault understand the development of knowledge. In Chapter Two it was briefly mentioned that process sociology regards the development of knowledge as occurring within human figurations themselves (Goudsblom, 1977, pp. 6, 105). As Elias writes, the “development of knowledge… is inseparable from the direction of changes in the form and structure of the communal life of humans” (Elias, 1992, p. 32). For Foucault, forms of knowledge, and the ‘selves’ about which they speak, are systematically developed within discursive formations; discourses are productive, and it is within discursive formations that knowledges and ‘truths’ are formed, as demonstrated in Chapter One (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). While Elias and Foucault do not share precisely the same perspective, it can be seen that there is certainly a similarity in their approach: that knowledge is formed within the relations between human beings and institutions. However, as Burke (2012) points out, while Foucault operates from a standpoint of not accepting the existence of social objects a priori and presuming that universals do not exist (Foucault, 2008b, pp. 2-3), Elias was wary of what he called a ‘relativist trap’, and believed in the possibility of obtaining knowledge that is “congruent” with “reality”, noting the ‘scientific knowledge’ of nature as the best example (Elias, 1992, p. 172). In this sense, Elias sees knowledge as something which can be obtained, while Foucault understands knowledge as being produced
within discourse, and not existing outside of it. This is indeed a significant
difference, and clearly points out that there are limits in the similarities in
approach and argument of Foucault and Elias.

There is also, in one sense, a similarity present in Elias’ work with Foucault’s
notion of power. Elias is concerned with the interdependent networks of
humans, and when he is interested in power, he is interested in it as it exists in
the networks of interdependencies (Elias, 2000, p. 481). When Elias discusses
kingship, he explains that he is not interested in how some specific individual
has gained power, but in how the interdependent networks and social
structures have enabled the institution to sustain itself (Elias, 2000, p. 188).
For Elias, figurations contain continually changing power balances among the
interdependent networks of humans (Smith, 1999, p. 80). Similarly,
Foucault’s account of power, as discussed in Chapter One, is one that
understands power as existing in the relations between subjects, institutions
and forms of knowledge – Foucault’s account of power is also one that
understands power as diffused in relations (Foucault, 2008a p. 93). Although
Elias does not refute power as being a zero-sum object in the way Foucault
does, he arguably has some similarity with Foucault’s approach – that is,
there is a focus on the networks themselves, not of power as being possessed
by “this man or that man” (Elias, 2000, p. 188).
Nonetheless, for Elias, there is a more direct relationship between a particular network of interdependencies and the self, and accordingly the behaviours they produce. For example, when discussing the increasing spread of pressure for foresight and a sense of personal constraint, Elias argues that:

To an increasing degree, the complex functioning of Western societies, with their high division of labour, depends on the lower agrarian and urban strata controlling their conduct increasingly through insight into its more long-term and more remote connections (Elias, 2000, p. 351).

In this sense, as Robert van Krieken (1990) argues, Elias presents the social conditions as being the explanation for the changes in the sense of self and behaviour. Foucault, on the other hand, sees the techniques of the self as a sort of intermediate process of translation (van Krieken, 1990), through which the requirements of behaviour, of what is expected (such as the importance for self-mastery or appropriate sexual practices, as defined by the appropriate bodies of knowledge) are internally subjectified (Foucault, 1990, pp. 10-13, 15-20). Both Elias and Foucault, in this regard, seem to understand power as producing forms of behaviour, but Elias’ account sees figurations as impacting behaviour in a more unmediated manner, whereby the human is themselves inseparable from those figurations (van Krieken, 1990). In this sense, there are similarities in Elias’ and Foucault’s approaches to power, but certainly only to a point.
Another significant similarity between the arguments made by Foucault and Elias is apparent in their respective discussions regarding the shift from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’. As discussed in Chapter One, Foucault regards the change in forms of government from the Middle Ages to contemporary forms as involving a shift towards ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 1991a). That is, Foucault argues that the centralisation of systems of authority has resulted in the development of various bodies of knowledge, and that these bodies of knowledge are utilised to achieve a sense of wellbeing among the population through a variety of ‘techniques of the self’ (Foucault, 1991a, p. 102). In such a way, Foucault argues that ways of constraining populations have shifted to forms whereby subjects ‘conduct their own conduct’, resulting from the various range of attempts by authorities of different types to act upon individuals and their ways of conducting themselves (Rose, 2000, p. 315; van Krieken, 1990). That is, Foucault’s argument regarding government of the self and others purports that there has been a shift in forms of government whereby the individual actively cultivates their sense of self and their behaviours, rather than being acted upon directly, and in a ‘negative’, coercive form, by systems of authority (Foucault, 1988a, p. 18; van Krieken, 1990). Similarly, Elias regards the changing forms of the structure of Western societies as being a process towards ‘civility’ and the monopolisation of authority, in terms of military force and financial structures (Elias, 2000, p. 268). Elias focused his analysis on the gradual transformation of the personality structure towards self-constraint, moving towards a more ‘civilised’ and less impulsive self, and Elias connected this change in ‘habitus’ as being the result of the change towards the monopolization of
authority and social interdependency (Elias, 2000, p. 409). There is a similarity present between both Foucault and Elias in this sense, since both scholars identify a shift in the forms of government from the Middle Ages onwards, from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’, and plot how these influenced the sense of self.

More importantly, both scholars argue that these changes in the structure of Western societies have led to a change in the ways in which individuals come to both experience and conduct themselves. That is, both Foucault and Elias argue that the ‘modern’ self is one who conducts their own conduct or internally constrains their behaviour according to the appropriate bodies of knowledge. Both Foucault and Elias argue that the ‘modern’ self is one who actively participates in the maintenance of their own conduct (van Krieken, 1990). Foucault argues that there has been an increasing focus on the concern for the self and a concern for self-mastery (Foucault, 1988a, p. 24), while Elias argues that there has been increasing pressure for self-constraint for the sake of social gain and survival (Elias, 2000, p. 370).

Moreover, as Smith points out, both Foucault and Elias focus some of their analyses regarding the conduct of the self on historical works giving advice on how one is to conduct themselves in relation to themselves and others (Smith, 1999, pp. 83-84). For example, Chapter One discussed a variety of works analysed by Foucault regarding the technologies of the self, such as Alcibiades I, while Chapter Two discussed Elias’ analysis of Erasmus’ De
**civilitate morum puerilium.** In this way, both Foucault and Elias focus their analyses on pedagogy’s of advice regarding the appropriate ways to conduct the self (Smith, 1999, p. 83).

It has been shown that, despite some distinct differences, there exist some important similarities between the approaches taken and arguments made by Foucault and Elias regarding the self and society. Indeed, both criticise modern forms of philosophy and history (largely since the Renaissance) as being limited in their approaches, arguing for an understanding of society and individuals as being in a constant process of change and movement, rather than as static and stable. Further, and importantly, both scholars argue that the modern individual is a ‘self’ who actively participates in their own conduct, and whose sense of self exists *within* the relations between humans (and, in Foucault’s case, discursive formations). In such a way, there is considerable convergence in the approaches taken by Foucault and Elias, and therefore it is argued that their two forms of thinking can offer contributions to the other.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has offered discussion on some of the similarities that exist between the approaches and arguments made by Foucault and Elias regarding the self and society in order to demonstrate the presence of some convergence in their thinking. Chapter One introduced the reader to Foucault’s key concepts and approach to analysing the ‘history of the present’. Foucault offers a distinct perspective, regarding ‘truth’ as not given, universal or fundamental, but rather as being systematically developed within discursive formations and the relations between people (Foucault, 1971, p. 8). Chapter One also showed how Foucault utilises his approach to explore the notion of the self and society, in which he argues that the experience of the self and related behaviours are cultivated through the process of subjectification and the technologies of the self (Foucault, 1986a). For Foucault, the experience of the self is developed and cultivated within discursive formations and practices.

Elias’ approach and arguments, as discussed in Chapter Two, differ in some ways to Foucault’s, but may also be considered to have some similarities and alignments with a Foucaultian approach. In Chapter Two, it was shown that Elias criticises the approaches of modern philosophy which view the self as *homo clausus* (Elias, 2000, p. 470). Instead, Elias argues for the view of the individual as *hominis aperti* – the ‘open personality’; in taking this understanding, Elias’ sociological approach is one that views society as being
in constant flux, focusing his analyses on the processes of change over time regarding the self and the structure of society (Elias, 1991, p. 36). For Elias, society is best understood as changing figurations, or networks of interdependent humans, and it is within these interdependent networks that Elias regards the sense of self, as ‘habitus’, as being developed (Elias, 2000, p. 482; Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998, p. 16).

In describing the approaches and arguments made by Foucault and Elias regarding the self and society, this thesis has discussed some of the similarities that exist between the thinking of the two scholars. It has been shown that Foucault and Elias both regard individuals, within societal structures, as ‘selves’ whose conduct is the result of the active participation of the self – of being actively concerned with one’s own behaviour and sense of self. While Foucault and Elias both take distinct approaches, Chapter Three has shown that there are some significant similarities and that some convergence is present in their thinking. This being so, it has also been argued that it may be possible to utilise some of the aspects of an Eliasian approach within a Foucaultian framework of inquiry, as well as combining Foucault’s thought within an Eliasian sociological account.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided some discussion regarding some significant similarities between the approaches and arguments of Foucault and Elias regarding the self and society. This thesis has aimed to reopen the scholarship and discourse regarding the similarities present in the works of
these two scholars, and to contribute further to this discussion. There has been limited scholarship regarding the convergence of the thought of Foucault and Elias, and further research should be considered in this area, not only on the analysis of the self and society, but also within other areas of inquiry.
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