
Ethical substance, modes of subjection and askesis: 'Techniques of the self' and ethical tuition in multicultural education

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Introduction: addressing the issues of values in a democratic society

If permitting and fostering diversity, respecting and tolerating individual differences while resolving disputes without recourse to violence is a definitive feature of modern democratic culture, the daily realities of this ethos present the practising teacher with a formidable array of challenges. Many educational theorists focus on the need for practical, market-orientated subjects within the contemporary curriculum, privileging mathematics, science, information technology and economics. While acknowledging the priority of such concerns and academic foci, curriculum planners are also concerned with more intangible, less 'practical' subjects, which explore history, society and the issues of ethics. However, located within either established democratic societies such as Britain or the United States, or emergent ones such as South Africa, curriculum planners and teachers are wary of the problem of prescription for others. In understanding the historical conditions of violence, exclusion and intolerance which have been countered by the emergence of democratic society, and appreciating that intolerance is often located in particular people's intransigent prescriptions for others, curriculum planners and teachers are often diffident when considering the content of courses on values and ethics. They fear that in a liberal democratic society, whose formal policy is respect for multicultural diversity, the introduction of such courses will be seen as prescriptive and impositional, a violation of the democratic individual's right to determine his/her own views and future. Given the history of religious bigotry and imperial arrogance, both of which have been pursued with persecutory zeal in the history of many countries and empires, the modern curriculum planner and teacher, who is also a committed liberal democrat, fears any programme in ethics and values which may be remotely reminiscent of such prescription, arrogance and imposition. While acknowledging the need for an ethical component in the modern curriculum, the planner and teacher frequently do not know how to proceed in a democratically influenced legacy,

which denounces historical practices of indoctrination, ideological and religious manipulation, and peremptory imposition.

Confronted by such anxieties and dilemmas, planners and teachers can often only resort to the recommendation that courses on ethics and values should focus on the nature and merits of the liberal democratic society within which we live and which we wish to perpetuate. The result can become a self-congratulatory paean to liberal democracy, an enunciation of its general characteristics and merits, and a vague commitment to the principles of tolerance and the incorporation of the views of all. Many may see this as ritualistic and perfunctory, insipid or sentimental, avoiding the realities of the substantial and critical differences which democratic tolerance engenders. How can modern curriculum planners and teachers confront the issues of substantial conflict in democratic societies, while averting the charge that they are illegitimately partisan or proselytizing, abusing their position as educators as they structure and direct the thinking of their captive audience in the classroom, the students themselves?

This paper focuses on the difficulties confronting multicultural educators today as they grapple with the issue of teaching courses on values and ethics. Multicultural education espouses a respect for the views and values of diverse cultures, and deprecates any attempts by educators to impose a particular ethical and cultural perspective on heterogeneous groups of students. The practical problem for the multicultural educator is how to negotiate this controversial and sensitive terrain. How does he/she address the substance of different and often-conflicting value systems without offending some of the students and appearing to privilege one perspective over the other, thereby incurring the charge of partisanship and possibly of indoctrination?

In addressing this quandary, and seeking to suggest some practical responses to it, the paper explores the later work of Michel Foucault, which focused on a reassessment of the nature of Greek, Roman and early Christian ethics. Foucault is selected because of the way in which his reevaluation of ethical conduct in these diverse societies stressed the inextricable relationship between thought and action, a synthesis of theory and practice that is imperative in any search for an articulation between the work of academic research and educational conduct today. His work also commends itself because it inserts itself into domains of controversy without assuming that the differences can be satisfactorily resolved – there is no assumption that if we persist with our discussions and adhere to the logic of inquiry, then we will reach consensus about our assumptions and agreement about their practical implications. The

diversity stimulated by the practice of contemporary democracy seems to intensify one's conviction that the convergence of perspectives (implying a consensus about premises and practical conclusions in our collective normative deliberations) in modern society will remain elusive indefinitely. This does not imply that ethical reflection is futile, or that ethical conduct is arbitrary. The absence of hope for convergence can still accommodate a concern for the relationship between particular assumptions and their attendant actions, a respect for the internal logic of any particular ethical conviction – if one concludes that an axiological system is cardinal, what are the consequences for the life of the individual or community embracing it? In particular, what is its potential for conflict with, and harm for, those who do not share it?

Without assuming that the reflections and prescriptions of the past can be transferred into the present, Foucault's reevaluation of the ethical deliberations of former societies offers some valuable orientations for ethical education today. Immersed in detail, sensitive to subtle distinction, respectful of historical specificity and, above all, cognisant of the interminable dialectic between thought and action, Foucault's study of the dynamics of former ethical considerations offers us a way of proceeding through many of the ethical dilemmas presented by the pluralism of contemporary society. This paper suggests that his work can offer today's educators, particularly those involved in the humanities, with their conspicuous axiological and ethical concerns, an approach to the substance of difference and a way of addressing it, which does not incur the reproach that they are being prescriptive and insensitive to the right to dissent, one of the fundamental rights upon which modern democratic society is erected and sustained.

Foucault's final concerns

In his final years, Foucault devoted attention to Greek and Roman understandings of ethics. This focus emerged as part of his enduring concern with the notion of the subject, present in the more methodological and epistemological explorations of his early work, as well as in his concern with the problematic relationship between power and knowledge. If, in his earlier work, Foucault had explicated how the subject is constituted within the matrix of language, which itself is inseparable from the exercise of power in society, the issue which preoccupied him in the last years of his life was the ways in which such a constituted subject, or individual, might relate to himself. It was in his re-examination of the complexities of Greek and Roman philosophy that

he developed a particular understanding of the self's relationship to itself, indicating how such an appreciation might have an impact on our self-understanding today.

One of the consistent features of Foucault's work seems to be his concern with the relationship between thought and action. His methodological and epistemological enquiries focus on the relationship between language and truth, and how these inextricable phenomena construct a particular knowing subject's relationship to the object of investigation. The complex relationship between the knowing subject and the object known is mediated by the language deployed, which permits one to assert the veracity of claims. The knowing subject does not assert and verify discursive claims in isolation, but lives and operates within the confines of the shared language or knowledge domain (captured in Foucault's notion of the 'episteme'), and is constrained by the actions which such knowledge directs. Societies generate knowledge about the natural and social worlds, and this knowledge guides investigation, action and the structuring of society. The impact which our epistemic and ethical claims have on one another, as well as our identification of truth and error, right and wrong, all indicate how these claims exercise power over us. The multiple forms of knowledge are the precise and structured medium through which people exercise power over one another. Our language, thought, truth claims and ethical asseverations all structure our social co-existence, indicating that there is an intimate relationship between thought and action.

Pierre Hadot, who held the Chair of the History of Hellenistic and Roman Thought at the College de France during and after Foucault's tenure at the same institution, argues convincingly (1995) that Greek and Roman philosophy's main concern was with the thoughtful transformation of the self. He has reviewed the context and concerns of Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism and Scepticism, suggesting how these currents in Greek philosophy (and incorporated into Roman culture after the establishment of Roman control over Greece) all displayed a central focus on 'spiritual exercises', on ways of living.

Spiritual exercises can be best observed in the context of Hellenistic and Roman schools of philosophy. The Stoics, for instance, declared explicitly that philosophy, for them, was an 'exercise'. In their view, philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory, but rather in the art of living – It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which he attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace and freedom (Hadot, 1995, p.83).

According to Arnold Davidson (1994), Foucault was influenced by Hadot's re-evaluation of the nature and import of Greek and Roman philosophy. Having sustained a detailed explication of the relationship between language, truth, power and the subject in his earlier work, Foucault developed an interest in the constituted subject's relationship to himself, and Hadot's focus suggested a profitable and illuminating line of enquiry.

Setting the proper intellectual context will help us to understand better the contours and emplacement of Foucault's own writing on ancient thought, and thus help us to see how his conceptualization of ethics relates to, derives from, and modifies a set of considerations that were not his alone (1994, p.116).

For Foucault, Hadot's work reflected a concern with the relationship between thought and action, indicating how this rich philosophical tradition concentrated on the ways in which the individual subject (in Foucault's terms, constituted by his own language and culture) became the particular subject he was. The traditions of Greek and Roman philosophy disclose how the subject, inevitably immersed within a nexus of linguistic and cultural influences, nevertheless reflects upon and modifies his heritage, refashioning himself according to the conclusions of his philosophical deliberations. Such a perspective was obviously interesting for Foucault because his focus on the exercise of power through the constraints of language led him to consider the meaning of freedom in the modern world. Greek and Roman philosophers, too, were concerned with the nature and possibility of the individual's freedom.

Foucault did not adopt Hadot's expression, 'spiritual exercises' (which have a long lineage in Western, particularly Christian, thought), but referred to this deliberative and transformative activity as 'techniques of the self'. In one of the last interviews conducted with Foucault before his death in 1984, he reviewed his understanding of what is involved in the 'techniques of the self'. Foucault identifies four basic components to this process.

- A concern with the *ethical substance*, which is that part of myself relevant to the domain of ethical judgement.
- The *mode of subjection*, which is the way in which the individual establishes his or her relationship to society's moral obligations and rules.
- *Askesis*, which is the self-forming activity or ethical work one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself into an ethical subject.
- The *telos*, which is the kind or mode of being to which we aspire when we behave in an ethical way (Foucault, 1984, pp.361-362).

Foucault makes the cardinal point in this interview that he is not concerned with a genealogy of morals, which is defined as the relatively stable codes that have been established and consolidated over time in any particular society. These are the very general prescriptions of society, such as the Ten Commandments, which regulate social conduct and with which each individual is expected to comply. They constitute the kind of moral conduct which any programme of socialization would strive to inculcate. Rather, Foucault alleges, he is concerned with a genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions, the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem (1984, p.356). This distinction seems to imply that the real focus of ethical enquiry is not conducted at the level of the rationale for, and the internal consistency of, general moral codes, prescriptions for all, with which all are expected to comply. The genealogy of ethics, the genealogy of the subject, is a much more demanding process, which explores the individual's reflective response to him/herself, as he/she confronts the immediacy of his/her own affective and desiring existence, his/her own inclinations, and makes thoughtful decisions about how to manage these. Inevitably, this involves reflection upon the expectations of society, but the ethical subject is one who focuses upon his/her interaction with these expectations, exercising judgement in a sustained practice of free evaluation, deciding what is appropriate for him/herself, and subjecting him/herself to a rigorous programme of self-discipline. Freedom is in no sense a relinquishment of obligation and control, a submission to whimsical inclination, but a reflective and disciplined relationship to oneself, a compliance with the convictions and prescriptions which one has forged for oneself in the process of deliberating upon the relationship between thought and action. Throughout, there is a sense of effort and struggle. Foucault identifies such concern at the centre of ethical reflection in the ancient world, and he explores this to illuminate what is important and substantial for our ethical identity today.

What interests me in the Hellenistic culture, in the Greco-Roman culture, is a precept for which the Greeks had a specific word, *epimeleiam heautou*, which means taking care of one's self. It does not mean simply being interested in oneself, nor does it mean having a certain tendency to self-attachment or self-fascination. It is a very powerful word in Greek which means working on or being concerned with something; it describes a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique (1984, pp.359-360).

One's *ethical substance* is central to this mode of reflection and action. It consists of each individual's passions and inclinations, the experience of affectivity, which really precedes any reflective intervention and conscious control. It is the basic impulses that each individual must direct as he/she develops a sense of mature freedom. The most intense of these inclinations are

the sexual ones, and Foucault explores this through his examination of the issue of homosexual relationships between men and boys in the ancient Greek world. What is interesting for Foucault is that the inclination itself is not condemned; one does not deplore an impulse or an attraction. Such responses of denunciation and disapproval are part of the legacy of Christian analysis, which views certain preferences as inherently wrong or 'sinful'. Instead, one confronts the desire, reflects upon it, and makes a decision about how to direct it; one subjects one's inclinations to a regulated form of expression or control.

This process of regulation is fundamental to the techniques of the self, and is captured by the idea of the *mode of subjection*. This in no way implies the suppression of desire or inclination, but a deliberative control of its expression – in what form of action should my inclinations manifest themselves, or to what forms of restraint should they be subjected? What is significant about these concerns is that the individual is submitting to a form of regulation that has been chosen by him/her. This regulation and controlled expression is part of the practice of freedom. Subjection does not imply the elimination of freedom, but a definition of its specific substance and expression.

Such deliberations inevitably involve the management of dilemmas. In the case of the desire for young boys, Foucault explains that reflective Greek men faced a particular problem. Young boys were prospective citizens, who as adults would be the equals of the desirous men, enjoying the same rights and status as the latter. The act of penetration in the process of sexual gratification was seen as a form of subordination and subjection which was incompatible with the boys' potential as citizens; one does not subject a potential citizen to the humiliation of subordination to another man's desires. One's respectability as a desiring man consists, not in the denunciation of the inclination, but in the exercise of restraint in the interest of preserving the boy's dignity as a prospective equal in Greek society. Such restraint also ensures the possibility of pursuing an enduring friendship with one to whom one is attracted, a friendship which is predicated upon a relationship of equality and respect, impossible if the boy has been subjected to a sexual act of subordination. The *mode of subjection* consists of this form of self-control and self-restraint, this thoughtful submission to a form of conduct that one adopts for oneself. It is an exercise in a particular practice of freedom (1984, pp.344-345).

The subjection of one's *ethical substance* to a particular kind of control and expression requires an arduous process of work upon the self. Central to the 'spiritual exercises', to the techniques of the self, was the notion of *askesis*. This Greek term is the origin of the English word, 'ascetic'. *Askesis*, however,

does not simply imply an abstemious life, but connotes a rigorous commitment to self-discipline, self-reflection and thoughtful practice. It requires that one pay close attention to one's thoughts and practices, one's relationship to oneself and others, in a continuous dialectic in which thought directs action, and action modifies thought. Although one is paying close attention to oneself, this does not imply a self-indulgent egocentricity, for the contemplative aspects of one's life manifest themselves in particular attitudes and modes of conduct towards others.

In Foucault's explication of the notion of *askesis*, he examines some of the concepts of the self that were explicit not only in the Greek and Roman worlds, but also in the early years of the development of Christian thought. This is important, for if one is to pay attention to the self, cultivate the 'techniques of the self', one has to proceed with some substantial concept of the goal, or *telos*, towards which the self aspires. Such goals are complex, because they are not simply defined by the individual. The individual inherits the understandings of the tradition into which he/she is born, and it is often tradition that conveys to the individual the kind of ambitions that are considered commendable. Individuals inducted into a Stoical way of thinking adopted and modified a particular conception of the self, its responsibilities and possibilities. One's *telos* becomes a state of eudaimonia, a certain equanimity in the face of adversity secured by the rigorous examination of what one can be expected to control. The latter focuses on one's responses to the circumstances and events of one's life, given that one can have very little influence on these developments. Eudaimonia, often rendered as 'happiness', does not refer to a condition of contentment, but rather to a sense of fulfilment, a satisfaction that one has secured control over one's responses and related one's general philosophical reflections to the particular circumstances of one's life, synthesizing thought and action. For the Christian, however, the *telos* is the attainment of salvation and eternal life. All *askesis* is directed towards subordination to the will and instructions of God. All activities and reflections are performed under the aegis of eternity, are a prelude to a superior spiritual condition. One understands the self, and works upon it accordingly, in the light of these fundamental notions of the appropriate *telos* and what is necessary for its attainment.

For Foucault, the Stoical examination of the self provides an interesting contrast with the later Christian understanding of the self, and an integral component of it, namely conscience. Stoical thinkers, such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who adopted the practice of ceaseless vigilance, considered the daily examination of conscience as a reflection combining 'meditation' and

‘gymnasia’. Meditation is an exercise in imagination, the contemplation of possible events, usually of a distressing nature, such as the constraints of mortality like sickness, accident and death, the fragility of friendship and loyalty. It is also a consideration of how one might respond to them. Such a meditation is complemented by gymnasia, which is a test of independence with regard to the external world, an exercise in applied thought to ascertain whether one is capable of practising the intentions and resolutions formulated during the meditative process (Foucault, 1988b, pp.35-36). The Stoical sense of self, and of work upon the self, is based on two key concepts. The first is that it is important to distinguish between what depends upon the individual and what does not. One cannot control or influence many of the events, occurrences and actions which one encounters in the world; all one can do is attend to one’s responses to these. The ‘techniques of the self’, the combination of meditation and gymnasia, are focused on this control of the individual’s responses. Foucault’s colleague, Hadot, expresses this concisely when he writes:

Attention (*prosoche*) is the fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude. It is a continuous vigilance and presence of mind, self consciousness which never sleeps, and a constant tension of the spirit – Thanks to his spiritual vigilance, the Stoic always has ‘at hand’ the fundamental rule of life: that is, the distinction between what depends on us and what does not (Hadot, 1995, p.84).

The second central idea is that of the self’s relationship to existence itself, and this constitutes a Stoic metaphysic in the sense of a set of basic assumptions about the nature of reality. These assumptions appear to be basically optimistic ones, declaring that the universe in which we find ourselves is directed by a rational process, which integrates all of its components for the best. We are consoled in our personal misfortunes by this assurance of the benevolent and rational nature of reality.

For the Stoic, then, doing philosophy meant practising how to ‘live’: that is, how to live freely and consciously. Consciously, in that we pass beyond the limits of individuality, to recognise ourselves as a part of the reason-animated cosmos. Freely, in that we give up desiring that which does not depend on us and is beyond our control, so as to attach ourselves only to what depends on us: actions which are just and in conformity with reason (Hadot, 1995, p.86).

Stoical contemplation, then, does not involve the self in a process of continual self-reproach and chastisement. One reflects upon the rules of action, thinks about how to respond to the experiences of life, and assesses the extent to which one has been successful in passing ‘beyond the limits of individuality’ and living in ‘conformity with reason’.

The Stoical attitude, with its conception of the self, is interestingly contrasted with the Christian notion of the self. The Christian concept has always evolved against the metaphysical foil of Creation and the Fall from grace. The self is consistently and continuously defined as being in a state of imperfection and sinfulness. Foucault refers to the Christians' sense that their self is something to be rejected. He writes that the early Christians understood themselves in terms of *exomologesis*, the recognition of the fact that one is a sinner, and that one must conduct one's life as a penitent. This must be demonstrated publicly, and conducted in the company of others who acknowledge the same status. Such an acknowledgement was then accompanied by the emergence of a spiritual literature, *exagoreusis*, which expresses and analyzes one's thoughts as a sinner and penitent. What is significant about this is that it is conducted under the supervision of a spiritual superior, to whom one is continually obedient. The self is eclipsed, subordinate and continuously involved in a process of restoration, ultimately dependent on the merciful grace of God (Foucault, 1988b, pp.43-48).

Foucault's historical review of aspects of Greek, Roman and Christian concepts of the self discloses for us some of the rich variety of the 'techniques of the self'. An individual's work of the self upon the self is profoundly affected by his/her idea of his/her place within the general scheme of things. This affects his/her understanding of his/her *ethical substance*, his/her attitude towards his/her own preferences and inclinations, and the way in which he/she should direct and control these. Sexual desire, for instance, is considered by certain Greek reflections, as an immanent, amoral inclination; one's ethical concern is with the expression of the desire, and the compatibility of this with other convictions about the status of other people and how they should be treated. For Christians, the very presence of sexual desire is often seen as a symptom of a fallen nature, an impulse which separates us from the purity of the divine, and submission to which can increase our distance from the holiness of God.

These historical illustrations are important for us today for two reasons. Firstly, they indicate the kind of detail that renders the notion of *modes of subjection*, *askesis* and *telos* substantial and credible. Secondly, they alert us to the fact that different epochs generate varied concepts of the self, concepts that are often divergent but co-existent. A viable multicultural strategy has to take cognisance of this diversity, and explore the possibilities of *modes of subjection*, *askesis* and *telos* in relation to such plurality. Only then might the educator accommodate the heterogeneity confronting him/her and evade the appearance of projecting standardized value systems onto his/her students.

He/she would simultaneously be respecting his/her students' autonomous pursuit of their selected goals and their attendant forms of self-discipline.

Ethical tuition in multicultural education

In an interview entitled, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", Foucault was asked, "Do you think that the Greeks offer an attractive and plausible alternative?" (to the way in which we live now). He replied:

I am not looking for an alternative; you can't find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people. I would like to do the genealogy of problems. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous – If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger (Foucault, 1984, p.343).

I think there is no value in a period which is not our period – it is not anything to get back to (1984, p.347).

If one is to consider Foucault's reflections upon ancient Greek and Roman ethics, as well as his observations about the Christian ethical life, as a guide to the teaching of ethics and values in a multicultural society, it is clear from the above comments that one cannot anticipate a simple transference of these ancient perspectives into the modern environment. How, then, can these reconstructions and analyses of former ethical systems illuminate the pedagogical task of axiological tutelage in a modern, multicultural situation?

Firstly, the notion of spiritual exercises, or techniques of the self, is one that the contemporary educator could adopt in a multicultural context. The individual citizen in a multicultural, liberal democracy is one who obviously has an *ethical substance*. Individuals have a complex combination of desires within their general matrix of emotions and inclinations. These encompass, for example, desires for personal wealth, professional status and recognition, a need for sexual and emotional fulfilment, the dignity of independence and self-sufficiency, and a concern with enduring health. There are also those who are attracted to the serious pursuit of religious vocations. Combined with such inclinations are particular dispositions, such as intolerance and impatience with those who do not share the same preferences and goals, or ways of conducting life.

Such a multitude of orientations within modern democratic society, a society whose liberal individualist ethos promotes the emergence and consolidation of difference and diversity, can only intensify concerns with issues related to the *mode of subjection*, focusing on the key questions of how shall I live and what shall direct my aspirations and conduct? The individual's concatenation of desires, inclinations and dispositions inevitably raises matters concerning regulation, expression and restraint, self-discipline and self-reflection. People aspiring towards professional success (measured in terms of personal wealth and recognition) must confront the questions of professional identity and conduct. What are the approved ways in which to proceed with the attainment of one's goals? How are the activities of doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers conducted? Here, issues of compliance, acceptable and unacceptable deviations from established norms (the exercise of reflective freedom) all become pertinent. Familiarity with legal procedures affecting patients', clients' and students' rights and duties, as well as knowledge about the appropriate methods available for the resolution of conflict, are all part of one's *mode of subjection*.

In the private domain, the gratification of sexual desire and the fulfilment of intimate relationships are also subject to particular forms of regulation. In recent years, homosexual inclinations have been decriminalized, and gay activists have insisted on society's acceptance of these inclinations as a normal option in the individual's search for emotional fulfilment. Such campaigners have had to contend with decades of accumulated social prejudice against such perspectives, and have striven to prevent such prejudices from interfering with the personal lives of gay people. Legal regulation prohibiting such interference has been introduced in many countries. At the same time, participants in gay relationships are themselves regulated by the more general notions of individual rights and duties that constitute modern democratic ideas of equality.

On a less complicated plane, those who are focussed on issues of personal health are aware of the self-discipline and nutritional imperatives required if they are to succeed in their aspirations. Personal resolution, dietary and physiological knowledge are necessary for the participant in sport and personal health issues. Within such a domain, ambitions differ, as do motivations. Some seek a comfortable and functional level of personal fitness, others seek the status of physical perfection or the glory of physically arduous achievement. These ambitions, too, are subject to different kinds of methods and evaluations, ones that proliferate as people's understandings of physiology and physical possibilities are enhanced.

Given the eclipse of traditional religious values by secular ones, Christians have had to rethink their relationship to their encompassing political, economic and social environments. What is the nature of their moral obligations now? Should they focus on matters of personal salvation, or devote themselves to the substantial, material needs of others, even if the latter are not Christians? How does one translate the broad ethical injunctions of the Bible into concrete, culturally contextual, practice? How does one deal with the incompatibility between alleged Biblical prohibitions (against homosexuality and abortion, for example) and tolerance (together with its legal sanction) for these orientations and practices in secular, democratic society?

The management and regulation of desires, inclinations and dispositions (the constituent features of our *ethical substance*), the submission (through necessity, preference or obligation) to *modes of subjection* to channel these, all point towards the contemporary relevance of *askesis*. It is upon this that contemporary programmes in multicultural values and ethics may concentrate, focusing on the individual's work of the self upon the self, his/her techniques of the self. This is the dimension of freedom or autonomy to which the student devotes attention as he/she seeks to relate his/her *ethical substance* to the *modes of subjection*, and to understand the complex interaction between them. The relationship between thought about oneself (one's inclinations and desires, one's rights and duties, one's preferences and priorities) and the actions one undertakes to pursue ambitions and goals, gratify desires and lead a fulfilling life, are all part of the continuous process of *askesis*.

Foucault's comment that the ancient world is "nothing to get back to" implicitly directs our attention to an important and distinctive characteristic of the modern self. As indicated above, the self presupposed by the Stoics was one that could ultimately position itself within the integrated scheme of the Whole; there was a sense that one was fortified in one's endurance of adversity by the conviction that the cosmos was a rationally ordered and benevolent entity. For centuries, too, Christians have lived with the assurance that the world is directed and regulated by the auspices of a personal and caring God. The individual conducts his/her life within the parameters of divine attention and concern, believing that compliance with the injunctions and teachings of Jesus Christ will ensure a meaningful and constructive life, and guarantee an eternal life with God Himself.

Part of contemporary life retains some of these convictions; the Christian faith endures in many parts of the world. However, a powerful current in modern, secular reflection repudiates these notions, subscribing to the idea that there is

no such regulative and benevolent entity as a personal God, nor an inexorably integrative force such as universal reason. This perspective can be seen as a source of anxiety or as an opportunity, and is explored as both in debates about individual freedom and in concerns with the development of the self. The self is seen as an entity that is susceptible to multiple possibilities and crystallizations. Such apparent indeterminacy fills some with dread, and others with excitement at the open-endedness of self-exploration and personal transformation.

These are complex and controversial issues, and ones that cannot be addressed here. The pertinent point in this context is that the diversity inherent in such perspectives is fraught with the possibility of conflict that, in the absence of any Divine or Rational arbitration upon which the individual can depend, has no guarantee of resolution. As individuals and social collectivities, we do have rationality to depend upon, in the sense of expedient and functional recourses that can establish provisional agreements and compromises in the regulation of our collective existence. These are, however, temporary and mutable recourses, and we live with the permanent possibility of changes and revisions that result in reorientations and the re-emergence of conflict. There is no supervising arbitrator, of a Divine or impartially Rational kind, who can resolve our differences and conflicts in a final and mutually satisfying manner.

It is such a depiction that leads a contemporary writer like Foucault to emphasize the prevalence of a sense of danger in modern society. A multicultural society is characterized by the presence of multiple ways of seeing and acting, by numerous correlations between thought and action, and these are often not compatible. Political, social and economic organizations assume definite forms in particular locations, and these often constitute a danger and disadvantage for some members of society. Some define liberal individualism as antipathetic to the values of collective solidarity and altruism, promoting loneliness and material avarice. Others denounce the myth of equality in a capitalist society, arguing that it is inherently exploitative and ruthless, concealing the reality of its brutality behind the rhetoric of equal opportunity and the importance of individual responsibility and initiative. People contest bitterly the 'right to life' of those who are as yet unborn, pitting this against the right of women to decide to give and sustain life. Disputes over the 'right to life' are also central to the issues of retributive justice, epitomized by capital punishment.

Immersed in a cacophony of controversy, curriculum planners and teachers find that the persistence of dispute is one of their only certainties. Courses on

values and ethics are directed to students whose selves are formed within such an environment. The teachers' obligations as educators in a multicultural environment preclude the presentation of a single, 'correct' perspective, as this appears as offensive, presumptuous and impositional. However, against the background of ineluctable diversity, courses in multicultural values and ethics can encourage students to concentrate on the 'techniques of the self.' Many formations of the self are possible, forged in the interaction between the individual's *ethical substance* and the *modes of subjection*, accompanied by the appropriate forms of *askesis*. Reflection upon these, and the adoption of particular dispositions and values by the students themselves, is the very substance of the exercise of freedom. If an educator is to take seriously the relationship between thought and action, part of his/her pedagogical obligation is to alert students to the practical consequences of beliefs and convictions. He/she indicates the kinds of conflicts in which they are likely to be embroiled in the lived experience of their decisions, in the practice of their particular mode of *askesis*. He/she also suggests the kinds of dangers and dilemmas to which the individual is exposed, and to which he/she may be seen to contribute.

Such an approach may successfully combine the discharge of the multicultural educator's duty not to impose values with a substantial consideration of the role of values in the individual's life. It makes possible a careful reflection on the relationship between *ethical substance* and the *mode of subjection* in the life of the individual, constituting a particular practice of freedom, embodying respect for the individual's autonomy. It does not presume that this is an easy process, divorced from the realities of conflict and incompatibility. It does not ignore the constraints exerted in the practice of reflection, choice and self-formation (*askesis*), since the dimension of social influence and the limitations upon the exercise of freedom become apparent in any consideration of the cultural and political context in which this individual formation is practised. The multicultural educator assists the individual student to consolidate a sense of self in its difficult relationship to its own interior and other people's presence. The educator promotes an ability without prescribing an outcome, leaving students with the informed task of continuing with the process of self-formation, and making decisions in the conflictual context of their own particular lives.

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