‘I'm interested in Foucault, but why should I be interested in history?’

In: Using Foucault's Methods

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Pub. Date: 2011
Access Date: April 9, 2020
Publishing Company: SAGE Publications Ltd
City: London
Print ISBN: 9780761957171
Online ISBN: 9780857020239
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857020239
Print pages: 2-20

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‘Foucault helps us see that sex isn't what nineteenth-century reform fanatics thought it was’, Inzammam tells his class-mates during a presentation.

‘Reading Madness and Civilization *makes it clear to me that women are constructed as mentally ill by a patriarchal system of health management,’ Jenny contributes on her first evening at the ‘recent French theory’ reading group her friends have been raving about*.

Zeeha, trying to explain to her father why he's wrong to see corporal punishment as a solution to the rising crime rate in their town, tells him she's learned from a book she's just read as part of her Criminology course that punishment is part of a larger system of discipline for societies, not a response to crime.

Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha are all good students with a new-found passion for Foucault. Let's follow them, at least some of the way, through their student careers to see how their passion for Foucault develops and try to help them over the obstacles which so often pop up in the paths of those who seek to use Foucault.

The first thing to be said is to reassure these three good students that they should not feel embarrassed about bumping into obstacles in seeking to use Foucault's methods. Foucault's methods are not easy to follow. Even though we can sensibly regard *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, The Order of Discourse' and ‘Questions of Method’ (Foucault 1972, 1981a, 1981b) as methodological in tone, they do not add up to a coherent statement of his methodology and they hardly constitute a user-friendly ‘how to’ guide to Foucaultian scholarship. Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha are keeping the company of more experienced scholars in stumbling at some methodological hurdles.

The first trap they have fallen into is to place limits on the use of history involved in Foucaultian scholarship. Helping them avoid this trap is the work of the remainder of this chapter. Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha are right to see that Foucault uses history as his main technique to make his points about sexuality, madness, punishment, the self, the body, and so forth. However, they are wrong to try to limit this move such that they

are free to make *ahistorical* political points about the present and/or the future.

Yes, Foucault does problematise simplistic categorisations of nineteenth-century attitudes to sex, the use of madness as a fixed diagnostic category, and the portrayal of punishment as no more than a component in a means—ends equation. But his problematisations never stop, his histories never stop. Inzammam speaks of sexuality as if we enlightened twentieth-century folk have overcome the hang-ups of our forebears; Jenny and Zeeha speak of madness and punishment respectively as if some ‘progress’ has been or might be made, or conversely as if modern life is ‘worse’ than the past.

The Foucaultian method's use of history is not a turn to teleology, that is, it does not involve assumptions of progress (or regress). This is why we say it involves histories that never stop: they cannot be said to stop because they cannot be said to be going anywhere. To use history in the Foucaultian manner is to use it to help us see that the present is just as strange as the past, not to help us see that a sensible or desirable present has emerged (Inzammam's error) or might emerge (Jenny's and Zeeha's error). Sometimes the Foucaultian approach to history is referred to as ‘history of the present’. Hopefully our discussion here helps make this term clear: Foucaultian histories are histories of the present not because understanding an ideal or complete present is the spur to investigation (this is sometimes called ‘whig history’). Foucaultians are not seeking to find out how the present has emerged from the past. Rather, the point is to use history as a way of *diagnosing* the present (on this point, see Rose 1990).

When we use history, if we are to gain the maximum benefit from the Foucaultian method, we must ensure that we do not allow this history to stop, do not allow it to settle on a patch of imagined sensibleness in the field of strangeness; as Foucault himself says, albeit in a different context, we should seek ‘to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest’ (1980a: 54). History should be used not to make ourselves comfortable, but rather to disturb the taken-for-granted. Inzammam should be aware that late twentieth-century attitudes to sex are as much part of the complex of power and knowledge around the idea of sexuality as were nineteenth-century attitudes. Jenny and Zeeha should be aware that feminist objections to current psychiatric arrangements and liberal objections to certain regimes of punishment are caught up with the complexes of power and knowledge around madness and punishment as much as are the arrangements and regime they would like to see changed.

We suggest two effective techniques to keep oneself aware of this pitfall:

> Look for contingencies instead of causes.
> Be as sceptical as possible in regard to all political arguments.

Look for contingencies instead of causes

Looking for contingencies instead of causes is not quite as difficult as it might sound. Imagine yourself at the centre of a site of one of your investigations — let's take punishment as an example. First, imagine yourself as an administrator of a new prison in 1870. You attempt to carry out instructions from central government to

the effect that prisoners are to be treated humanely but, in line with new penological thinking, not encouraged to speak to one another. You have to balance this demand with the difficulty of disciplining the prison's guards, who are used to more direct methods, often violent but nonetheless based on regular interaction between prisoners. As well, you feel hamstrung by the fact that other administrators at the prison have not received the same classics-based university education that you have received, but have secured their positions by means of family connections; they see no logic in the government's directive and side readily with the guards in the ‘tried and true’ way of going about things.

Now, quickly transport yourself to the twelfth century. You are the dispenser of justice in a blood-feud system. One man has stolen a pig from another. The system of justice in which you are a major player is restitutive rather than punitive. This means that when a person is wronged the wrong-doer must restore something to the person wronged; punishment is not a direct consideration. In line with common practice you are present to oversee the pig owner taking the arm of the pig stealer, for this is considered proper restitution. Things go somewhat awry when the pig owner, feeling particularly aggrieved because it was his best pig and not just any old pig, tries to take an eye as well as the agreed arm. In other words, he feels the need to punish, not just to restore. You have to respond.

We will offer another example later in this chapter, as part of Exercise 1.1.

Both these imaginary situations contains more contingencies than you can poke a stick at; that is, they are littered with developments sensibly seen as *accidents of history*. When we describe an historical event as contingent, what we mean is that the emergence of that event was not necessary, but was one possible result of a whole series of complex relations between other events. It takes far more intellectual effort to see these developments in terms of causes and effects than it does to accept them as contingencies. This is why we say the technique of looking for contingencies instead of causes is not as difficult as it sounds. The problem is, most of us get into the habit of looking for causes. We need to break this habit in favour of the easier move of accepting them as contingencies.

In the first example the idea of imprisonment as a punishment is a contingency. The position of administrator as a separate career position is a contingency — while such positions were common enough in Ancient Greece and Rome, they disappeared as a common feature of European life for quite some time, returning only in the wake of other contingencies like the development of printing and of large-scale government budgets based on new taxation methods. So, the idea of a central government powerful enough to issue instructions about various matters and have them treated with any degree of seriousness away from the direct influence of the immediate personnel of that government is itself also a contingency. Still another is the idea of treating prisoners humanely yet not allowing them regular speaking contact with one another, which seems to our late twentieth-century way of thinking a contradiction — it is a contingency of the development of penological knowledge, itself a contingency as well. It is also a contingency that the prison's guards are more comfortable with more direct methods of controlling prisoners. It is a contingency that some administrators receive a university education while others do not. It is a contingency that classics was the discipline base of an administrator's university education in the nineteenth century; today it is much more likely to be economics

or some other social science. It is a contingency that family connections were a more common route to government jobs in nineteenth-century Europe than they are today, or than they were then in, say, China, where a long tradition of public examinations had dominated as a means of deciding such matters. It is a contingency that governmental logic is more widespread at some times than at others.

Now, when we say that these events are contingent, this is not the same thing as saying that anything could have happened or did happen. Of course, there were definite pressures at work which meant that punishment started to become ‘humane’, for example. The point that Foucault regularly makes, however, is that so often our much-cherished advances are the quite accidental result of some apparently unrelated change. Of course Foucault is not the only social theorist who has made this point. Max Weber, for example, spoke of the ‘unintended consequences’ of history; for example, how certain puritan theological concerns could lead to some rather surprising turns — like the inventions of tarmac or chocolate.

Our group of budding Foucaultian scholars should not despair at this jumble of contingencies from just one small example. As we suggested, seeing contingencies instead of causes is a habit that is easy to acquire. It is more a question of *not* taking the steps to introduce causes into the equation than it is of doing something extra. To draw up a list of contingencies such as that presented above certainly involves historical investigation — a knowledge of some facts, to put it bluntly — but it does not require an exercise in artificially designating some items on the list to be primary and others secondary, or even tertiary, or designating those on the list to be in some subordinate relation to an item not on the list but which one is supposed to know as the primary source for details which make up such lists. To the Foucaultian way of thinking, such exercises in causal logic are futile. For Foucaultians, there is no reason to suppose, in considering this small historical example, that the training of prison administrators is in a relation of subordination to the dominance of classics as a discipline base, or the other way around, or that the distribution of positions based on family connections is in a relation of subordination to the development of governmental logic, or the other way around, and so on. And certainly the Foucaultian way of approaching history can have no truck with the idea that any one of the contingencies listed, say the imperative to keep prisoners from speaking to one another, is in a relation of subordination to the unspoken, unseen development of capitalism and its need for a quiescent workforce.

It might help you to learn this technique if, each time you deal with an historical example, you make use of a device sometimes employed by historians — the diagram with arrows. Of course you will have to completely invert its standard format to have it help you learn Foucaultian modes of scholarship, but this could well be a boost to its educative value: where the historians concerned draw the arrows in the diagram to demonstrate causal flows from subordinate to superordinate components, by always making the arrows double-ended and by drawing them such that they connect every component to every other component, and/or by leaving the arrows out of the diagram altogether, you will actually demonstrate the absence of causal flows, you will show how components have only contingent relations with one another, that, to put it bluntly, they may be connected in any pattern or they may not be connected at all.

It almost goes without saying that this will leave your diagram looking either bare and bereft of pattern or order, or alternatively looking like a mass of jumbled lines, again with no pattern or order. Now you're starting

to catch on. A couple of French scholars quite close to Foucault — Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari — suggested in a famous essay (1988) that patterns of knowledge should be seen as analogous not to a tree with its unidirectional pattern of growth from roots up to branches and leaves via a solid trunk, but to a rhizome — a collection of root-like tentacles with no pattern to their growth, a set of tentacles which grow in unpredictable ways, even growing back into each other. You may find this contrast of analogies helpful in thinking through this aspect of Foucault's methods.

Let's work quickly through the second of the examples we constructed above together and we can then leave you to handle the third example on your own as the first exercise of this chapter.

The very idea of a blood-feud system of justice is the first contingency you bump into in this example. Straight away the skills of contingency spotting you are fast acquiring will be tested to the limit, for it is all too easy in a case like this one to assume that the intervening eight hundred years have been filled with that mysterious substance called progress and that the system of justice which prevails in your modern setting is vastly superior to that featured in this example. Foucaultian contingency spotting will soon teach you simply to see a blood-feud system as one system and the modern system you're used to as another and teach you to leave it at that. In this spirit you will recognise restitutive justice as another contingency and accept as part of this that when a person is wronged the wrong-doer must restore something to the person wronged without consideration of punishment. This step will not prove too difficult if you bear in mind the modern distinction between criminal and civil law. Remember that once O.J. Simpson was found innocent of murder and hence relieved of the danger of punishment, he still had to face a civil trial in which the outcome concerned whether he had to restore something to the immediate families of the murder victims, and if so, how much. This is a legacy of the restitutive systems of justice which only moments ago may have seemed so alien to you.

It is a contingency that the system of justice in question equates loss of an arm with loss of a pig. Again you must guard against false progressivism. Certainly it seems strange to us that body parts should be equated with the loss of livelihood-producing animals, but it helps to realise that it would almost certainly seem strange to the participants in this example that our system sometimes involves the equation of something as abstract as sums of money and confinement with the loss of the lives of loved ones. Recognising strangeness in all social arrangements is an important part of using Foucault's methods.

As well, we should identify contingencies: in the attempt to occasion revenge and punish beyond the prevailing justice arrangements (don't make the mistake of thinking that this is a universal, eternal reaction to such a situation — it happens at some times and in some circumstances and we must treat it as such; this of course is at the heart of the meaning of the term ‘contingency’); in the choice of an eye as the ‘organ of punishment’ (different cultures have placed different value on the eyes as objects of punishment, restitution and revenge — at some times and in some places they have been targets for all three, others for none, and still others for, say, just revenge but not punishment or restitution); and in the role of some sort of neutral moderator, the role you're playing in this example (in some restitutive systems of justice such a figure was involved, but in others the parties sorted things out themselves).

Of course in this example too we must see every contingency in a contingent relationship with every other contingency. There is no necessary pattern to their relating. Indeed there is nothing necessary about their relating at all — they may or may not relate in any way, and if they do, the form of their relationships to one another is not dictated by any pattern or any outside force; to attribute the status of cause and/or effect to any one of them or to any outside force would be to falsely impose some necessity of relating onto them. Again, the drawing of a multi-directional (or anti-directional) arrowed diagram of all the identified contingencies might be helpful.

Okay, now it's your turn.

EXERCISE 1.1

Consider the following example and compile a list of at least four contingencies contained within it. Make some notes on the necessary relations that can sometimes be assumed between your contingencies:

> Take yourself forward again, this time right up to the present. You are a schoolteacher faced with a particularly unruly group of pupils. You design and implement a system of graded punishments in an attempt to impose order. You believe you are being very careful as you go about this exercise, drawing on the detailed knowledge of children's development you learned during your training as a teacher. However, a group of parents complains to the school principal that the step in your system which entails keeping miscreant children after school is draconian. You suddenly find yourself disciplined by the principal as, unbeknown to you, the government education authorities, acting in response to a United Nations document about the rights of children, have very recently instructed principals to ban detentions as a cruel and unusual punishment.

To complete the exercise, draw two diagrams, one using two-ended arrows to show every contingency related to every other (just a patternless jumble of related contingencies), and the second, free of arrows, to show no relationship between them (just a patternless jumble of unrelated contingencies). Think about how different this is to an exercise in the application of causal logic.

Be as sceptical as possible in regard to all political arguments

Now let's move on to our other recommended technique — be as sceptical as possible in regard to all political arguments. This technique is closely related to the technique of seeing contingencies instead of causes. It is

particularly useful in helping guard against the obstacle we saw Jenny and Zeeha run into — using history to see potential for progress in the future even if it has supposedly not been achieved in the present.

To be sceptical is not to be cynical. Scepticism is a careful, deliberate way of thinking usually traced back to the ancient Greeks. This is not the place for a detailed exposition of the history and practice of different forms of scepticism, though a brief outline will be helpful. Of necessity the outline is very crude (we thank James Butterfield and Jeff Malpas for their help with this sketch; its crudeness stems from the restrictions of our usage, not from their understanding; you might also like to consult Hankinson 1995).

Greek scepticism developed into two distinct camps. One is known loosely as Academic scepticism (after the famous Academy), the other as Pyrrhonian scepticism (after its founder, Pyrrho of Elis, a third-century BC philosopher). Academic scepticism is built around the proposition that we cannot know anything. This proposition is taken as the basis for radical rejection of all truth claims. Pyrrhonistic scepticism is based on the proposition that we cannot know anything, *including the fact that we cannot know anything*. The extra dimension has enormous consequences and allows the Pyrrhonistic proposition to serve as the basis for a decidedly less radical suspension of judgement. It is this second, Pyrrhonian, scepticism that we are urging here.

Pyrrho did not leave any written works, consistent with his complete scepticism. What we know of him comes to us through remaining fragments about him and some of his leading pupils. One such fragment reads:

> Pyrrho's pupil, Timon, says that anyone who is going to lead a happy life must take account of the following three things: first, what objects are like by nature; secondly, what our attitude toward them should be; finally, what will result from those who take this attitude. Now he says that Pyrrho shows that objects are equally indifferent and unfathomable and indeterminable because neither our senses or our judgements are true or false; so for that reason we should not trust in them but should be without judgement and without inclination and unmoved, saying about each thing that it is no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is or is not. And Timon says that for those who take this attitude the result will first be non-assertion, then tranquillity, (cited in Annas and Barnes 1994: x)

You can see from this that Pyrrhonism, fully developed, is more than a methodological device; it is something approaching a way of life. Don't be alarmed by this as it's true of most philosophical positions when pushed to their limits. We could not hope easily to learn its intricacies as a way of life. What we can and should do is explore the possibilities of the step loosely summarised by the term ‘suspension of judgement’. To do this, as we have already suggested, we need not follow Pyrrhonism through all the historical details of its various twists and turns — suffice to say that it had a big revival in the second century AD at the hands of Sextus Empiricus, went into something of a decline, then was revived again from the fifteenth century, eventually gaining a strong foothold in modern thought via thinkers like Montaigne and Hume — but as Sextus provides the most detailed surviving account of what it involves, we should spend a little time with him.

In a book usefully entitled (for our purposes at least) *Outlines of Scepticism* (1994), Sextus suggests that the Pyrrhonistic method involves a rejection of any discovery of truth (the dogmatists' position) and of any total denial of the possibility of discovery of truth (the Academics' position) in favour of indefinite continuation of investigations. This aspect of Pyrrhonian scepticism — one of two main aspects — Sextus calls ‘investigative’. Crucially, for us, it entails careful description of appearances:

> By way of a preface let us say that on none of the matters to be discussed do we affirm that things are just as we say they are: rather, we report descriptively on each item according to how it appears to us at the time. (Sextus Empiricus 1994:3)

The other main aspect of Pyrrhonism for Sextus is ‘suspensive’; this is the suspension of judgement highlighted above. Sextus says the best way to move toward this goal is to ‘set out oppositions’. This means constantly dividing each of appearances and thoughts — the sum total of knowledge for the Pyrrhonian sceptic — into two: one and its opposite; that is, a thought and its opposite, an appearance and its opposite. The idea is not to affirm or deny any proposition, but to move away from the possibility of doing so and toward the desired suspension of judgement. By continually seeing only oppositions — ‘to every account an equal account is opposed’ (Sextus Empiricus 1994: 5–6) — the mind will, it is claimed, eventually stop judging. This procedure, again, is much easier said than done, but it is extremely valuable.

It should be clear that appearances are important for the Pyrrhonian sceptic. Unwilled, passive appearances, according to Sextus, are the only bases on which a Pyrrhonian sceptic can properly assent to a proposition. But — be careful here — this is a very limited form of assent: confronted with the proposition that honey is sweet, the Pyrrhonian sceptic will assent that honey appears sweet, but will not be drawn on the question of whether it really is or is not sweet; this is a matter for perpetual investigation and hence for suspension of judgement. Sextus tells us that Pyrrhonian sceptics accept appearances as the guidance of human nature because they accept the appearance that humans are naturally capable of perception and thought (hence the statement above that appearances and thoughts are the sum total of knowledge). In line with this, they accept the necessity of feelings such as hunger, cold, heat and thirst, they accept the operation of whatever customs and laws appear to be operating, and they accept the operation of whatever expert knowledge appears to be operating (such as medicine) (Sextus Empiricus 1994: 8–9).

Sextus also takes us through a series of complex steps in elaborating the idea of oppositions — the opposition of what appears to what appears, of what is thought to what is thought, of what appears to what is thought (and vice versa), what is present to what is past or future (and vice versa), even what is present to what is present. We need not follow him completely down this path — it is further than we need to go for our purposes — but one of his summary statements is worth quoting as a means to conclude our dealings with him (note how it takes us towards suspension of judgement):

> Before the founder of the school to which you adhere was born, the argument of the school, which is no doubt sound, was not yet apparent, although it was [in the eyes of the present] really there in nature. In the same way, it is possible that the argument opposing the one you have just propounded

> is really there in nature but not yet apparent to us; so we should not yet assent to what is now thought to be a powerful argument. (Sextus Empiricus 1994: 12)

What is most important for us at this juncture — and, we suggest, for folk such as Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha — is to devise the most straightforward way to suspend judgement such as to gain maximum benefit from the Foucaultian approach to the historical study of various objects, but before we do let's briefly consider one published work which makes at least some use of a Pyrrhonian approach in using Foucault's methods.

As one of a group of texts which have sought to use Foucault's methods to outline the conditions under which certain modern educational techniques have emerged, allowing us the possibility of viewing education in a new way, Ian Hunter's (1989) account of the invention of the aesthetic citizen allows us to understand the realm of personal experience as one which is neither fundamentally individualistic nor one which results from the imposition of a dominant ideology. Hunter is able to demolish the arguments of those for whom education is either class control or a victory for enlightenment thinking; he is able to do this precisely because he uses history without judgements.

The nineteenth-century educational reforms of David Stow are crucial for Hunter, and it is through his analysis of Stow's contribution that Hunter points out where most theorists of education go wrong:

> [They] assume that education is a manifestation of culture, pictured as the historical reconciliation of an exemplary opposition between the self-realising and the utilitarian, the self-expressive and the normative. They disagree only over whether this universal movement towards the complete development of human capacities has already occurred or has been blocked by a freezing of the dialectic on the side of ‘class cultural control’. However, it seems to be the case that self-realisation and social norms, self-discovery and moral training, are by no means opposed to each other in Stow's modified version of the pedagogical disciplines. Quite the opposite: it was in the supervised freedom of the playground that moral norms would be realised through self-expressive techniques; and it was in this space that the forms of self-discovery organised around the individual would *permit* the realisation of new social norms at the level of the population. (Hunter 1988: 38–9, emphasis in original)

Hunter's counter-intuitive conclusion arises precisely because, in taking Foucault seriously, he refuses history as the search for ahistorical political judgements. He refuses to make judgements about causality (he is especially adept at refusing those causal stories which are so familiar that they are usually unquestioned). He stresses the unintended consequences of action. You should be able to see that Hunter does not make assumptions about the relation between the present and the past: he does not think the past inferior (because unenlightened — usually the liberal error) or superior (because naive — usually the Marxist error).

In returning to Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha, we stress that in one sense the suspension of judgement is at the heart of all modern intellectual inquiry, not only that line of inquiry just discussed. When we investigate, say, religions, work practices, family relationships, or any other object of intellectual inquiry, we are of course

supposed to keep our personal judgements out of the picture. Inzammam, Jenny, Zeeha and every other student who has done or is doing a course in the humanities, social sciences or even hard sciences anywhere in the western world knows this already. The suspension of judgement we are talking about here is, it should be clear from the above discussion of Hunter's work, of a different order. It is neither of the simple ‘keep your judgements out of your work’ variety (which we can expect of students anyway), nor that of the sophisticated full-on practitioner of Pyrrhonism (which, as we said, is far too much to expect), but something in between.

Suspending second-order judgements

The suspension of judgement involved in good Foucaultian use of history is largely about suspending judgements other than those you happen to recognise as your own: what we call second-order judgements. From the outset we stress that with even this intermediate form of the suspension of judgement no one ever totally succeeds in this objective (at least no-one who remains active in intellectual inquiry). To escape from second-order judgements completely would be to go all the way down the path of the Pyrrhonian way of life — something which we keep saying is well beyond the scope of a training in Foucaultian methods (to give you some idea, it would equate to achieving the mental and physical discipline necessary to become a Zen Buddhist monk; indeed, given that Pyrrho was known to have travelled with Alexander the Great through what is now India, there is a least a shred of evidence that the two may be related). It is the *process* of attempting to escape the grip of second-order judgements which is central to Foucaultian historical methods, not so much the outcome of each attempt. The process must involve a genuine *attempt*, but not necessarily complete success (on the inevitability of failure in intellectual and governmental projects, see Malpas and Wickham 1995, 1997).

So, what exactly are the targets of this methodological technique? When any aspect of any object being investigated is granted a status (perhaps this status is labelled ‘cause’, perhaps something else) which draws its authority from another investigation, a second-order judgement is made: a judgement made previously is exercised, brought out from its kennel and given a walk. In this way, you make judgements without them being technically your own judgements. This is the second-order level of judgement the Foucaultian technique aims to suspend; it is second-order judgements which allow ahistorical political points into the picture. Another cluster of examples, based on each of Inzammam's, Jenny's and Zeeha's reading of a particular text by Foucault, will help make this clearer.

Remember that we are trying to help our group of students avoid the trap of setting limits on the historicisation involved in Foucaultian scholarship. More particularly we are trying to help them avoid making *ahistorical* political points about the present and/or the future.

In one of his later books, *The Care of the Self* (1986), Foucault builds a careful picture of techniques developed by the ancient Romans for establishing regimes of self-management, including dream analysis and the analysis of marital behaviours. For us, this is Foucault at his best. It is hard to find a second-order judgement in this volume; it is free of ahistorical political claims based on such judgements. Foucault

suspends such judgements to the point where we are presented with a simple and elegant historical compilation of self-management techniques. Many students (and some others) find this a frightening prospect. So used are they to the presence of second-order judgements in historical investigations of such social objects — the basis of their ahistorical political claims — that when confronted with a text which has suspended them, they are forced to invent them. Such an error often takes the following form: while Foucault's history is accepted at face value on first reading, the process does not stop there; at least one more reading is performed, usually by force of habit rather than conscious design, and it is through this and subsequent readings that second-order judgements creep in and ahistorical political claims are made.

Inzammam, Jenny and Zeeha have each developed their Foucaultian interests to the point where they have read *The Care of the Self*. Inzammam has read it for an advanced class he is taking in social theory; Jenny has read it as the next text in a line of Foucault's books her flourishing reading group is working its way through; and Zeeha has read it as background reading for her Criminology studies, trying to ascertain whether some common sense of self informs Roman methods of punishment. We stress again that these three students are good students, working well in their student careers and learning to be good Foucaultian scholars; we highlight their errors because they are common errors, not because these students are particularly error-prone.

Inzammam accepts Foucault's history at face value on his first reading and then habitually performs another reading. This technique has stood him in good stead in his advanced theory class; he has made good grades for seeing connections between Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* and Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in terms of the treatment of outcast groups. In *The Care of the Self* Inzammam's second reading identifies a variety of outcast groups in ancient Rome and proposes an argument that variations occurred between the techniques of self-management available to these groups and more dominant groups. This argument is encouraged in Inzammam's class. Inzammam is able to push the argument further by imposing on ancient Rome some political standards of the late twentieth-century western world. This subsequent reading of Foucault's text sees Inzammam making the point that the non-dominant Roman groups would have benefited from the counselling provisions of certain twentieth-century anti-discrimination legislation.

In discussing Inzammam's error we are not disputing the truth of his ahistorical political claim: whether it is true or false is beside the point. The point is that such claims are not the stuff of good Foucaultian scholarship and our objective here is to show how this error can be avoided. We are not saying that students should not make political claims — this is of course a normal and, unless one attains the status of Pyrrhonian ‘monk’, an inevitable part of intellectual life; as Bernard Williams puts it, we ‘need a politics, in the sense of a coherent set of opinions about the ways in which power should be exercised in modern societies, with what limitations and to what end’ (1993: 10–11). What we are saying is that it is possible and desirable to separate such claims from productive readings of Foucault's histories, to put them into a separate category of intellectual existence and use Foucault's methods without habitually exercising this category of existence. The way to do this is, first, to identify the moment when the second-order judgements raise their heads. If we can do this

successfully, the second step of isolating ahistorical political claims will be easy.

As we have made clear, the moment of the first appearance of second-order judgements is not the moment when direct political claims are made — not when Inzammam sees a connection with anti-discrimination politics. This is a later stage. Second-order judgements tend to sneak in hiding under the cloak of a mysterious figure being brought to bear on the object being analysed. This ‘mysterious figure’ is usually a representative of the reading habit pointed to above, perhaps best identified by the name of a particular author, though this can be somewhat misleading. We suggest that the ‘mysterious figure’ who imports second-order judgements into Inzammam's account is Karl Marx. We suggest further that Marx is the culprit for much second-order judging in the second half of the twentieth century. Before we elaborate this point using Inzammam's error as an example, we should briefly defend Marx by way of cashing out our remark that identifying the source(s) of second-order judgements by the use of the name(s) of particular author(s) is somewhat misleading.

Marx is a convenient resting point for our argument as he does indeed litter his works with methodological encouragement that his readers see politics in everything they read and, of course, he is not at all bashful about making political claims himself. But he can hardly be said to have invented this habit. We might at this point turn our attention to Rousseau and his zeal for making intellectual work a tool of the Revolution as if this were all it could ever be, but this too would be misleading. We suggest we can safely leave the matter by pointing to the existence of ancient debates about the necessity or otherwise of political involvement for living a ‘decent’ life. Let's just say that as well as being beyond the scope of this book, these debates are still unresolved (it would be remiss of us, however, not to make clear, if it needs clarification, that the Pyrrhonian sceptical position does not regard political involvement as necessary for a decent life; it does not oppose such involvement, it simply accepts the appearance that some people are politically involved). Names like ‘Rousseau’ and ‘Marx’ are simply markers — albeit important ones — of contributions to this debate.

The technique which has stood Inzammam in such good stead in his advanced theory class is one dominated by Marx (with the above qualifications, of course). The good grades earned for seeing connections between Weber's, Durkheim's and Marx's texts in terms of the treatment of outcast groups were actually earned, unbeknown to Inzammam, by giving Marx's habits priority over those of the other two. This is not to say that Weber's and Durkheim's texts are free of second-order judgements, only that the habit is much stronger in Marx. Inzammam has learned this habit as good scholarship and Marx is the obvious author used when learning it. ‘Always look beneath the surface,’ Inzammam has taught himself, with plenty of prompting from his teachers. ‘I can find political connections if I look hard enough.’ This is certainly true, but it is also — crucially, we say — a judgement Inzammam is importing into his reading.

The judgement, note carefully, is that there is something there, something hidden, not so much that the something is political. That it is something political is the next step, followed, in Inzammam's case, by a step that identifies it as something to do with outcast groups (and then by another step which identifies it as something with a possible connection to anti-discrimination legislation). We hope that by now it is clear that the steps which follow the second-order judgement are, in an important sense, inconsequential. In terms of

the best use of Foucault's methods we are writing about here, it does not matter what content is put into the steps after the second-order judgement has done its work. What Inzammam makes of the ‘hidden meaning’ of *The Care of the Self is*, for us, of no great moment. Our concern is with the fact that he feels compelled to make anything of it at all, indeed that he feels compelled to track down such a beast as a ‘hidden meaning’. Inzammam makes a second-order judgement the moment he moves away from accepting the appearance of Foucault's book as a compilation of details about Roman life, the moment his mind wants more, in his case a Marxian-influenced ‘deep’ meaning. At this point an aspect of the object being investigated — the supposed ‘class’ division between Roman techniques of the self — is granted a status — not necessarily ‘cause’ but certainly ‘important feature’ — which draws its authority from another investigation — any one or group of Marx's investigations. A judgement made previously — by Marx, but, as we've indicated, by many others before him as well — is exercised.

It's worth reminding you again that you should not expect your mind to ever stop wanting more. What we're urging here is that you make the effort, not that you succeed. It is through the attempt that you can at least succeed in the far less ambitious goal of being as sceptical as possible in regard to all political arguments. If you can check yourself to even a limited extent in the habit of making second-order judgements, you are well on the way to being properly sceptical in regard to political arguments in others' work and, more importantly, in your own. As such you are far less likely to fall into the trap of placing limits on the historicisation involved in Foucaultian scholarship, the trap at the heart of this chapter. Inzammam would not make the political claims he makes if he could curb his habit of second-order judgement; he would instantly be more sceptical and hence he would be in a much better position to dodge the trap of limiting historicisation.

Another example

Let's work quickly through one more example and then leave you with another exercise to complete the chapter. We'll deal with Jenny's reading of *The Care of the Self* as a reading group text and we'll hand on to you Zeeha's reading of it. Jenny's French theory reading group has arrived at *The Care of the Self* immediately after working through some texts in the tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The group is bringing some interesting insights to Foucault's text in the light of this intellectual exercise.

At this point we must stress the care needed in dealing with the sorts of examples we (and you, if you are tackling the exercises diligently) are working through here. There is a real danger that you might take what we said about Inzammam and what we are about to say about Jenny and her reading group colleagues as licence for a sort of anti-intellectualism: if allowing pre-read authors like Marx to be the bearer of second-order judgements is a problem, perhaps it's best to avoid intellectual influences altogether and just go with our own reactions to the texts we read. While there are a couple of bizarre precedents in the history of theorising for such a move — Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer (over a hundred years apart) practised a type of ‘cerebral hygiene’ (in Comte's compelling phrase) to try to free their minds from the ‘pollution’ of other writers' thoughts (Ritzer 1992:16, 36) — this is not at all the direction we are promoting in this book. We strongly encourage Inzammam in reading the sociological classics and Jenny and her friends in reading

widely in recent French theory. In targeting the problems created by second-order judgements we are not in any way seeking to limit the amount of reading good students do. Indeed, one of the by-products of the way we handle the Pyrrhonian heritage is an almost unfettered eclecticism. Treating seriously the proposition that we cannot know even that we cannot know means accepting all intellectual influences with the same sceptical acceptance of how things are. Taking exception to second-order judgements and their effects does not equate with taking exception to intellectual influences *per se*; it simply (or complexly) means treating them with sceptical respect.

Jenny, like Inzammam, accepts Foucault's history at face value on first reading but then she too habitually performs another reading. For Jenny this is necessary not because of a training in making overt political points — we will see shortly that the political arguments which follow Jenny's second-order judging are much more subtle than those which follow Inzammam's — but because she and her friends find French theory so foreign. Every text they have dealt with in the reading group has seemed impenetrable to them on first reading. They have had to work very hard on each occasion to ‘make sense’ of what they read. This has been especially true in the case of the psychoanalytic texts they have just put aside to deal with *The Care of the Self*. Where Inzammam and his class-mates have learned boldly to push ahead and impose political meanings on the texts they meet, Jenny's group has learned almost the exact opposite — to find meaning in the texts is a difficult and painstaking business, requiring an ethic of trying not to impose Anglophone values on a French text, an ethic only partially helped by familiarity with the French language (the group has become wary of any Francophone members who assume an attitude of superiority to those without such familiarity). Jenny habitually performs a subsequent reading of Foucault's text because she has an expectation that this text must be ‘difficult’ in the way all other ‘French theory’ texts are ‘difficult’. It is in this way that Jenny allows second-order judgements to creep in and on the basis of them she and her friends make subtle ahistorical claims about theory and the way it should be handled. For example, they claim that Foucault can and should be read as part of a French intellectual movement — beginning with the Revolution and including nineteenth-century romanticism as well as twentieth-century traditions in feminism and psychoanalysis — concerned with the freedom of the individual.

In discussing this error we again stress that we are not disputing the truth of Jenny and her friends' ahistorical political claims: whether they are true or false is beside the point. Remember, such claims are not part of good Foucaultian scholarship and we try simply to show how this error can be avoided. And just as we acknowledged the inevitability of students making political points about the general exercise of power in society, so we must acknowledge the inevitability of at least some of them making political points about the much more particular use of power involved in techniques of reading and ‘doing’ theory. We here must repeat our exhortation that students learn to separate such claims from productive readings of Foucault's histories, to put them into a separate category of intellectual existence and try to use Foucault's methods without exercising this category (of course, it should hardly need repeating, they will never succeed in this completely; it's the attempt which is crucial). Let's again identify the moment when the second-order judgements raise their heads such that we can easily take the second step of isolating the ahistorical political claims.

In this case, the moment of the first appearance of second-order judgements is not the moment when the subtle political claims are made — not when the group proposes *The Care of the Self as* the latest in a long line of books about the freedom of the individual. Here again the second-order judgements tend to sneak in, this time under the cloak not so much of a mysterious figure as of a mysterious foreignness — the foreignness of the French theoretical tradition. The result, however, is very similar — second-order judging leads straight to the search for hidden meaning. Before we elaborate this slightly, we need to defend 'the French theoretical tradition' in the way we defended Marx.

While it is certainly the case that many individual French authors have deliberately fostered the idea that there is an air of impenetrability about their particular writings and the tradition from which they come (and Foucault himself is occasionally guilty of this in remarks in his interviews), these authors cannot be said to have invented this habit. Again we could return to some ancient debates, this time about meaning, to find early examples of this habit, though we would probably have more joy if we looked at the Christian tradition of exegesis, the idea of working hard to discover true meaning in a sacred text, but yet again we must remind you that such an investigation is well beyond the scope of this book.

The technique of reading employed by Jenny and the other members of her reading group relies for its force on this idea of the impenetrability of certain texts. They have learned this habit as good scholarship. 'Always look beneath the surface,' Jenny has taught herself, with plenty of prompting from her teachers and from the other group members. 'I can find deep meanings if I look hard enough.' This is true, but it also a judgement Jenny is importing into her reading.

The judgement, remember, is that there is something there, something hidden, not so much that the something has any particular quality. We say again, the steps that follow the second-order judgement are, in an important sense, inconsequential. In terms of the best use of Foucault's methods, the content put into the steps after the second-order judgement has paid its visit is of no interest to us. What Jenny makes of the 'hidden meaning' of *The Care of the Self* is of no great moment. Our concern is with the fact that she feels compelled to make anything of it, that she feels she must look for 'hidden meaning'. Jenny makes a second-order judgement the moment she moves away from accepting the appearance of Foucault's book as a compilation of details about Roman life, the moment her mind wants more, in her case a 'French' 'deep' meaning about the freedom of individuals. At this point an aspect of the object being investigated — the 'quest for freedom' 'contained in' Roman techniques of the self — is granted a status — not necessarily 'cause' but certainly 'important feature' — which draws its authority from another investigation — any one or group of French investigations conducted in the name of such a quest. A judgement made previously — by many others — is exercised.

Why not exhort yourself one more time: check yourself to even a limited extent in the habit of making second-order judgements and you are well on the way to being properly sceptical, you are far less likely to fall into the trap of placing limits on the historicisation involved in Foucaultian scholarship. Jenny would not make the subtle political claims she makes if she could curb her habit of second-order judgement; she would instantly be more sceptical and hence she would be in a much better position to dodge the trap of limiting

historicisation. Let's consider this error in more detail.

EXERCISE 1.2

Consider the following description of Zeeha's reading of *The Care of the Self* and identify the point at which she first relies on a second-order judgement, describing this judgement in your own words.

> Like Jenny and Inzammam, Zeeha accepts Foucault's history at face value on first reading but then also habitually performs another reading. Zeeha, like Jenny but unlike Inzammam, is not out to make overt political points. She seeks only to find some common link between the various techniques of the self Foucault describes as part of her quest to find a common logic behind Roman punishments. She has looked at many texts on Roman life with this in mind. On each occasion Zeeha has tried very hard to find hints about the 'real feelings' of Romans. Somewhat like Jenny, she has come to believe that textual analysis is a difficult and painstaking business. Zeeha habitually performs a subsequent reading of Foucault's text because she has an expectation that this text must be 'difficult' in the way all other texts about Roman life are 'difficult'. On the basis of this, Zeeha is quietly claiming that Foucault's book can and should be read as one of a group of texts about the 'real feelings' of Romans.

Now, bearing in mind that it is unnecessary to dispute the truth of Zeeha's quiet ahistorical political claim, and remembering that Zeeha has learned this habit as good scholarship (she too tells herself, 'Always look beneath the surface,' and, 'I can find deep meanings if I look hard enough') please outline, as simply as you can (in about 750 words), the method by which this error can be avoided.

http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857020239.n1