PHILOSOPHY AS COMPETENCE AND ART OF SELF-CREATION: BRINGING HABERMAS AND FOUCAULT TOGETHER

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Abstract

In the perspective of the notion of modernity advanced by Jürgen Habermas, the dynamics of our contemporary world can be identified along the terms of expert knowledge, critical thought, and practical application. While a high-quality expertise is necessary for the solution of any challenging particular problem, an additional type of knowledge associated with critical thinking is indispensable for its adequate application in practice. In line with Habermas' view of the role of philosophy in modernity as a "mediator" between the spheres of theory and practice, we can identify this additional knowledge as being in its nature philosophical. Furthermore, in distinction from the knowledge of the specialized expertise, this philosophical knowledge can be described as having the character of competence. In this sense, I maintain that thinking critically consists in utilizing philosophical competence, alongside expert knowledge, in solving particular problems. I link this notion of modernity with Michel Foucault's investigations on what he calls "technologies of the self." Foucault has traced various forms of self-care and self-knowledge, and has indicated their importance in "the art of living" (tekhne tou biou) from Antiquity onwards. He has emphasized their productive relationship in self-cultivation and social life adding a voice to Nietzsche's concern that the modern Westerners have neglected the "great and rare art" of self-creation for the sake of self-knowledge. In my view, this Foucauldian sense of the art of living as self-creation can supplement the Habermasean notion of the mediating role of philosophy in modernity, as they can be both seen as forming distinctive aspects of what was termed philosophical competence. I maintain that in the general case one's philosophical competence is essentially self-knowledge powered by one's background of humanistic knowledge and that – in a line with a long tradition of thought – it is a subject of cultivation and active self-creation.

The present paper[1] is an attempt to put into perspective the role and place of philosophy in the dynamics of our contemporary world. Today it passes for a cliché that this dynamics is startling

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[1] The idea of this article was first discussed at the international academic seminar *Modern Philosophy and Politics in Continental Europe* at the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics in Beijing, PR China, on December 15, 2009. It was then presented in a more developed form at the international conference *The Affect* of

by its breadth, pace, and complexity of relations along which it unfolds. What seems to be overlooked, though, is that despite the fact that the contemporary scientific-technological culture has greatly facilitated the bulk of activities associated with the human condition, our time has not relented in posing challenges to our both socio-cultural and individual existence – and in various ways. In this sense, the question of "the art of living" attains a distinctive contemporary flavor of both existential unavoidability and epistemic insufficiency. It demands time and again to be addressed in its most general and basic form: How can we cope with the challenges of our time in the best and most promising ways?

Being at once philosophical and trivial, this question may at first seem to be the unlikely candidate to guide us in situating philosophy in our contemporary world. However, its philosophical triviality allows it to be asked and actualized equally well on both socio-cultural and individual level. In this way, our investigative perspective will seek to make compatible and incorporate the modern and postmodern perspectives, by transposing its subject-matter within both of them inclusively; that is, with view to the whole in terms of universalistic metanarrativity, as much as with view to the plurality of unique singularities.[2] Thus, being metaphilosophical in focus, our investigation will aim at specifying the socio-cultural presence of philosophy, as well as its presence in the life of the single individual.

With regard to the question we asked, a most preliminary answer would be that if we have a sufficient knowledge of the challenges of our time and if we know how to use that knowledge, we would be able to cope with them optimally well. Such an answer, however, remains very general and in need of elaboration in more specific terms. Here I shall endeavor to secure them by drawing primarily on the thought of Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, two thinkers whose investigators most commonly see in opposition to one another[3] but sometimes also as compatible and complementary.[4] For the purpose of this paper, I shall

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[2] On the differentiation modern-postmodern in this sense, see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979), pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff.

[3] Samantha Ashenden and David Owen, *Foucault contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1999); David Ingram, "Foucault and Habermas," in Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Bent Flyvbjerg, "Habermas and Foucault: Thinkers for Civil Society?," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 210-233; Stephen Kemmis, "Foucault, Habermas and Evaluation," *Curriculum Studies*, Volume 1, No. 1 (1993), pp. 35-54; John Brocklesby and Stephen Cummings, "Foucault Plays Habermas: An Alternative Philosophical Underpinning for Critical Systems Thinking," *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, Volume 47 (1996), pp. 741-754; Annemiek Richters, "Modernity-Postmodernity Controversies: Habermas and Foucault," *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 5 (1988), pp. 611-643; Thomas L. Dumm, "The Politics of Post-Modern Aesthetics: Habermas Contra Foucault," *Political Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (May 1988), pp. 209-228; Thomas Biebricher, *Selbstkritik der Moderne: Foucault und Habermas im Vergleich* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag GmbH, 2005).

[4] Jessica J. Kulynych, "Performing Politics: Foucault, Habermas, and Postmodern Participation," *Polity*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Winter 1997), pp. 315-346; Amy Allen, "Discourse, Power, and Subjectivation: The Foucault/Habermas Debate Reconsidered," *Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2009), pp. 1-28; Nancy S. Love, "Foucault & Habermas on Discourse and Democracy," *Polity*, Vol. 22, No.2 (Winter 1989), 269-293; Ehrhard Bahr, "In

position myself into the latter group and shall seek to identify in the philosophical outlooks of these two thinkers connecting points of compatibility and complementarity. I shall thus sideline the so-called Habermas-Foucault debate on issues such as modernity, rationality, knowledge, and power.

I shall elaborate on the first part of our preliminary answer, which concerns the knowledge of the dynamics of our time and of the challenges it poses, using Habermas' discussion of modernity, in whose perspective this dynamics can be apprehended in the terms of *expert knowledge*, *critical thought*, and *practical application*. While I shall address its second part, which concerns the human capacity to use that knowledge, drawing mainly on Foucault's investigations on what he calls "technologies of the self," in which the "art of living" can be apperceived in the terms of *self-knowledge*, *self-care*, and *self-creation*.

Thus, the exposition of this paper will move along two main steps: the first will be to delineate a working specification of the meaning of the term "modernity" and to situate the role and place of philosophy within its structure; the second will be to lay down the indispensability and pertinence of "the art of living" to the single individual in the postmodern human condition.

1. Situating Philosophy in Modernity: Philosophy as Competence

In the contemporary philosophy and socio-cultural theory, the term "modernity" is used very broadly, most typically in reference to the socio-cultural world and its most general characteristics as identifiable within the eponymous period in the history of the West. The beginning and the putative end of that period have been a subject of debate, but the term standing for it has been involved in setting the general frame, horizon, or context of understanding for a good many discussions in contemporary philosophy and cultural theory, including the one of its delimiting sister term "postmodernity." Here, I shall not delve into the differentiation of these two terms, which has been very convincingly conveyed by Jean-François Lyotard amongst others.[5] I shall instead speak of "our contemporary world with its most general characteristics" in the broadest sense, as spreading over and encompassing the senses of both of them, even if to a varied extent, with "our" here understood as including both "socio-cultural" and "individual." I acknowledge that the concept of "modernity" as understood

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Defense of Enlightenment: Foucault and Habermas," *German Studies Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Feb., 1988), pp. 97-109; Matthew King, "Clarifying the Foucault – Habermas Debate: Morality, Ethics, and 'Normative Foundations'," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, Vol. 35, No. 3, pp. 287-314; Christian Lavagno, *Rekonstruktion der Moderne: eine Studie zu Habermas und Foucault* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2003).

[5] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), especially pp. 3ff, 83ff; cf. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), SS. 11ff, 104ff; Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (eds.), *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997); Anthony Giddens, "Modernism and Post-Modernism," *New German Critique*, No. 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter, 1981), pp. 15-18; Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), especially pp. 1-10, 45-53; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), especially pp. 10ff, 327ff; Agnes Heller, *A Theory of Modernity* (Malden, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), especially pp. 1-18; Okwui Enwezor, Nancy Condee, Terry Smith (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2009).

in the last century already included the sense of "our contemporary world with its most general characteristics," which was consequently passed by extension to that of "post-modernity." Thus, while "our world" has certainly changed overtime, much of what characterizes modernity has in all actuality come to characterize post-modernity as well, including such socio-cultural features as: division of labor; politically democratic (even if also some totalitarian) societies; predominantly market economies; interdependence between theory and practice (knowledge-economy); national, ethnic, cultural, and spiritual plurality; intensive cultural and intercultural exchange; global integrations and polarizations; concerns for human rights, social justice, and environmental safety, among still others. In this sense, the term "modernity" appears so general that any attempt at making it more specific risks ending up with an arbitrary characterization that may falter when related to particular contexts of its usage, more often than we wish. This surely poses a challenge to our metaphilosophical task of situating philosophy in our contemporary world as a peculiar blend of features of both modernity and post-modernity. Nevertheless, some of the features of modernity identifiable in Habermas' perspective on it can specify its meaning to an extent that will serve the purpose of this paper sufficiently.

Habermas has paid a great deal of attention to the notion of "modernity" throughout his works, including in his magnus opus, *The Theory of Communicative Action*,[6] and has contributed to and inspired the debates on it, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. It will not be an exaggeration to call that notion substantive for his socio-cultural and metaphilosophical perspectives, as they appear to be elaborated on and specified by way of its critical analysis and reconstruction. He sees the beginning of modernity in the Enlightenment and in the work of Kant in particular,[7] whereas his reconstructive analysis of Max Weber's view of rationalization and disenchantment of the Western religious consciousness[8] forms the basis of his own concept of it.

According to Habermas, "modernity" is characterized by "division of labor," marked by an increasing "compartmentalization" along the lines of professional specialization of various domains, subfields, vocations, and activities.[9] He identifies two distinctive levels of

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[6] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, translated by Thomas McCarthy, *Vol. 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); *Vol. 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987). Cf. *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns: Band I: Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung*; *Band II: Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1981). Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990); cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Philosophie als Platzhalter und Interpret," *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983); Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*: *Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge MA; London, England: MIT Press, 1992); cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1988).

[7] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, p. 260; cf. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*, S. 306.

[8] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, *Vol. 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, pp. 148ff, and especially 230-242; *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns: Band I: Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung,* SS. 225ff, 317-331.

[9] Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," pp. 13-14, 17-8; cf. "Die Philosophie als Platzhalter und Interpret," SS. 20-21, 25.

modernity – the level of "expert cultures" and the one of "everyday communication."[10] The former, which includes "science, technology, law and morality,"[11] is the level of theory and produces what he calls *expert knowledge*; the latter is that of *practical application* of the expertise produced on the level of culture. Thus, every area of knowledge on the level of culture works in its own specialized compartment to produces the expertise that serves certain specialized practices on the level of everyday communication.

In this grand stage of exchange of expertise between and along the levels of theoretical culture and everyday practice of modernity, the main actors are the humans in their specific roles of problem-solvers. Armed with *expert knowledge* produced on the level of culture they solve problems on the level of everyday communication by way of its *practical application*. Every problem solver, working in a particular compartment of modernity, needs to acquire the expertise associated with specific problems arising in his or her specialized occupation in order to be able to solve such problems in practice. In this sense, the acquisition of *expert knowledge* and its *practical application* are two necessary conditions for successful problem solving, with which no problem solver can dispense. The question that arises now is Is there anything else that one needs to know in order to be successful in solving problems in practice? Or, to put it otherwise, Does an adequate transfer of expertise from the level of culture to that of everyday communication require any additional knowledge? Or What else, if anything, a problem solver needs to know in order to successfully complete the transition of expert knowledge from theory to practice?

We can find an answer to this question in some of Habermas' further analyses of the structure of modernity. According to him, there are certain "problems of mediation" that arise in the exchange of expertise in modernity, both among the different fields on the level of culture, and between the levels of culture and everyday communication, for which these fields do not have sufficient expertise.[12] Because these problems arise despite the fact that the expert fields have already divided and appropriated all issues that can be reasonably addressed in particular areas of investigation, Habermas maintains that they are to remain in the scope of philosophy as their most legitimate "interpreter," one that – throughout its long tradition – has acquired an "eye trained on the topic of rationality."[13] Thus, for Habermas, although philosophy – in the course of its history – has given up its traditional metaphysical aspirations and its claim to a principal status among the other areas of knowledge, it still has a role to play in addressing the problems of mediation arising in the exchange of expertise in modernity – the role of *mediating interpreter*. With regard to philosophy's relation to the scientific areas of knowledge, he writes,

> Once it renounces its claim to be a first science or an encyclopedia, philosophy can maintain its
> status within the scientific system neither by assimilating itself to particular exemplary sciences nor
> by exclusively distancing itself from science in general. Philosophy has to implicate itself in the

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[10] Ibid., pp. 17-8; cf. SS. 25.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*: *Philosophical Essays*. p. 39; *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*, S. 46.

[12] Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," pp.17-18; cf. "Die Philosophie als Platzhalter und Interpret," S. 25.

[13] Ibid., pp.17-18; cf. S. 25.See also Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*: *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 38-39; cf. *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*, S. 45-46.

fallibilistic self-understanding and procedural rationality of the empirical sciences; it may not lay claim to a privileged access to truth, or to a method, an object realm, or even just a style of intuition that is specifically its own. Only thus can philosophy contribute its best to a nonexclusive division of labor, namely, its persistent tenacity in posing questions universalistically, and its procedure of rationally reconstructing the intuitive pretheoretical knowledge of competently speaking, acting, and judging subjects yet in such a way that Platonic anamnesis sheds its nondiscursive character. This dowry recommends philosophy as an indispensable partner in the collaboration of those who are concerned with a theory of rationality. [14]

In this its role, philosophy has given up its claims 'to be a first science' and to have 'a privileged access to truth, or to a method', but this does not mean that it has to 'assimilate itself to a particular science', or to 'distance itself from science in general'. It means only that philosophy needs to adopt a 'fallibilistic self-understanding and the procedural rationality of the empirical sciences', in terms of which it can help reaching understanding by 'posing questions universalistically' and 'rationally reconstructing the intuitive pretheoretical knowledge of competently speaking, acting, and judging subjects'. And as it appears, it is only its 'dowry', gathered in its long history, that entitles philosophy to this mediating role, which makes of it 'an indispensable partner' in the exchange of expert knowledge in the structure of modernity.

Yet, for Habermas, not only does philosophy have a role to play with regard the expert areas of knowledge on the level of culture. Its mediating role extends also to the 'lifeworld' and everyday communication:

In everyday communication, cognitive interpretations, moral expectations, expressions, and evaluations cannot help overlapping and interpenetrating. Reaching understanding in the lifeworld requires a cultural tradition that ranges across the whole spectrum, not just the fruits of science and technology. As far as philosophy is concerned, it might do well to refurbish its link with the totality by taking on the role of interpreter on behalf of the lifeworld. It might then be able to help set in motion the interplay between the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive dimensions that has come to a standstill today like a tangled mobile. [15]

On the level of everyday communication, philosophy's focus is on the intermixture of 'cognitive interpretations, moral expectations, expressions, and evaluations'. Here too, its goal is that of 'reaching understanding', but again the expertise of 'science and technology' will not suffice for its achieving. What is needed is a broader all-encompassing knowledge – 'a cultural tradition that ranges across the whole spectrum' – which can serve as a common ground for and thus ensure an adequate cross-communication. For Habermas, philosophy's capacity is well-versed in this regard because of its traditional focus on and 'link with the totality'. Thus, philosophy is well-qualified and could enter 'the role of interpreter on behalf of the lifeworld' in order to mediate, interpret, and thus ensure a smooth exchange between its 'cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive dimensions'.

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[14] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*: *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 38-39; cf. *Nachmetaphysisches Denken: Philosophische Aufsätze*, S. 45-46.

[15] Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," pp.18-19; cf. "Die Philosophie als Platzhalter und Interpret," SS. 25-26.

In this way, Habermas situates philosophy in the structure of modernity by assigning to it a role that the expert cultures (science and technology, ethics and law, aesthetics and art) cannot play on their own. This is the role of *mediating interpreter* which facilitates the exchange of expertise within and between modernity's compartmentalized levels of culture and everyday communication. What falls into the scope of philosophy in particular are the so-called 'problems of mediation', which arise in the due transfer of *expert knowledge* between the specialized compartments in the grand division of labor of modernity, where this transfer is essentially the *practical application* of that knowledge.

Here I shall elaborate a bit further on the character of the role of philosophy assigned by Habermas, by drawing attention to one of its aspects, which is attestable and identifiable in tackling the 'problems of mediation' and is closely related to their status. What I have in mind is that, whereas within the grand picture of exchange of expertise in modernity these problems can be seen as problems of communication, in the sense in which we think of them as remaining in the scope of philosophy, we can also think of them as *philosophical problems* which the problem solvers face in their various applications of expert knowledge in practice. [16] Traditionally, the philosophical problems have been characterized as being of epistemic or cognitive nature, as they concern the acquisition, retention, actualization, and application of knowledge. Such problems have already been signaled in various areas of theoretical and practical endeavor, including education[17] and social policy,[18] and it seems indeed legitimate to think that one can search for knowledge on them in the philosophical tradition. But if philosophy is to have the capacity to tackle such problems, as Habermas suggests, it will have to supplement the expertise of science with a knowledge that is of a different kind. To distinguish the character of this knowledge from that of the scientific expertise, here we designate it with the term *competence*.

The term played a key role in Habermas' earlier work in which he develops his theory of communicative competence – basically his own socio-cultural perspective on language and communication, [19] developed in relation to Noam Chomsky's concept of linguistic

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[16] Rossen Roussev, "Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice: A Response to Recent Concerns for Critical Thinking," *Telos*, No. 148 (Fall 2009), pp. 91-92.

[17] Martin V. Covington, "Strategic Thinking and the Fear of Failure," in *Thinking and Learning Skills*, Judith W. Segal, Susan F. Chipman, and Robert Glaser (eds.) (Hillside NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1985); Jack Lochhead, "Teaching Analytic Reasoning Skills Through Pair Problem Solving", *Thinking and Learning Skills*, Judith W. Segal, Susan F. Chipman, and Robert Glaser (eds.) (Hillside NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1985); Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking*: *What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*, (Rohner Park, CA: Sonoma State University, 1990); Mathew Lipman, "Thinking Skills Fostered by Philosophy for Children," in *Thinking and Learning Skills,* E Judith W. Segal, Susan F. Chipman, and Robert Glaser (eds.) (Hillside NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1985); Matlin, M.W., *Cognition*, (Geneseo NY: Harcourt Brace Publishers, 1994).

[18] W. T. Jones, *The Sciences and the Humanities: Conflict and Reconciliation* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 5ff.

[19] Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse.* Suhrkamp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); "Towards Theory of Communicative Competence" and "On systematically distorted communication," both in *Inquiry*: *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 1-4 (1970), respectively pp. 360-375 and pp. 205-218; "Der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik," in *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik: Theorie-Diskussion*, mit Beiträgen von Karl-Otto Apel, Claus v. Bormann, Rüdiger Bubner, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hans-Joachim Giegel, Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971); Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie. Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971).

competence,[20] the speech act theory developed by John Austin and John Searle,[21] and the latter work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Summing up the view he advances there, Thomas McCarthy writes,

> Habermas argues that our ability to communicate has a universal core-basic structures and fundamental rules that all subjects master in learning to speak a language. Communicative competence is not just a matter of being able to produce grammatical sentences. In speaking we relate to the world about us, to other subjects, to our own intentions, feelings, and desires.[22]

We can note here that this Habermas' sense of competence with regard to speaking language includes an access to a universalistic, common-to-all-speakers basis, which ensures the possibility for reaching understanding. This basis, however, is not merely grammatical, as it also involves a sense of relation of the speaker to oneself, other speakers, and the world.

This sense of competence is also retained in his later work, notably in his theory of communicative action, where he uses the term quite extensively in various statements and expressions, which more or less convey implicitly the aspect of philosophy I designated above.[23] Here I will draw particular attention to a few of his usages which most directly point to that aspect. On one occasion, when he writes that "the social scientist has to draw on a competence and a knowledge that he has intuitively at his disposal as a layman,"[24] Habermas associates 'competence' with knowledge and ability available to every person. In another statement where he defines "personality" he says that "competences ... make a subject capable of speaking and acting, [and] put him in a position to take part in processes of reaching understanding and thereby to assert his own identity."[25] Elsewhere he speaks of the "general competences of knowing, speaking, and acting" and of "a preponderance of competence (of

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[20] Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, I965).

[21] John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955,* edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Oxford: Clarendon Press, I962); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, I969).

[22] Thomas McCarthy, "Translator's Introduction," in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I*, p. x.

[23] For instance, in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I*, he uses expressions as 'reflective competence' (p. 2), 'competent speaker(s)' (pp. 25, 138, 286)//15, 30, 135 'competence to speak and act' (p. 112), 'interpretive competence' (pp. 118, 130), 'judgmental competence (pp. 119, 135), 'action through competences and motives' (p. 174), 'general competency' (p. 261), 'theory of competence' (p. 328), 'competence to represent' (p. 366), 'cognitive competence' (p. 384); in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. II*, expressions as again 'competent speakers' (pp. 15, 30, 135), 'competence to follow a rule' (pp. 17, 18, 19, 22), 'competence to judge/decide' (pp. 18, 19/269), 'competence for rule-governed behavior' (p. 18), 'competence for role behavior' (pp. 31, 32), 'interactive competence' (p. 40), 'competences for speech and interaction' (p. 43), 'competences for communicative action' (p. 91), 'competently acting reference persons' (p. 137), 'generalized competences for action' (p. 141), 'formal competences' (p. 146), 'competence to act' (p. 171), 'competence to carry out decisions' (p. 180), 'competence for purposive-rational choice' (p. 212), 'acquired competences' (p. 225), 'competences developed through socialization' (p. 255), competence of "initiates;' of experts in matters of knowledge or of morality 276, 'sovereign exercise of competence' (p. 308), 'legal competence' (p. 309), 'professional competence' (p. 363), 'social competence' (p. 399).

[24] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I*, p. 112.

[25] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. II*, p. 138.

knowledge, moral-practical insight, persuasive power, or autonomy)." [26] Whereas characterizing his own theory of communicative action, Habermas says that it "describes structures of action and structures of mutual understanding that are found in the intuitive knowledge of competent members of modem societies."[27]

If we are to sum up the sense-associations made in these examples, 'competence' relates to knowledge, ability, scientist, layman, capacity for speech and action, personality, identity, intuition, moral-practical insight, persuasive power, or autonomy, membership in society. In other Habermas' usages we find it as reflective, interpretative, cognitive, formal, interactive, judgmental, generalized. Within this broad semantic range of its usage, the sense of 'competence' is most aptly delimited as knowledge and ability. As knowledge it is a very general sense of one's relation to oneself and to the world, which thus has the transcending universalistic character of a common basis for understanding, but which also remains indeterminate and thus very different from expertise. As an ability, it involves the capacity for or the power to utilize that knowledge in terms of reflection, cognition, speech, and action, which is at the disposal for every human person from scientist to layman.

Here I shall use this sense of competence to further specify Habermas' notion of philosophy as mediating interpreter. I would like to link the knowledge-aspect of competence to the knowledge of philosophy, different as it is from that of expertise, and its ability-aspect to the role which Habermas envisions for philosophy in modernity. Understood in this way, *philosophy becomes a competence* having the aspects of a general universalistic knowledge and the ability to utilize that knowledge, which constitute its capacity to play its mediating role in the grand division of labor of modernity. Philosophical competence is thus an indispensable aspect of any thinking that applies expertise to solve problems, whereas every problem solver, in addition to their being a certain expert, needs to be also a philosopher.

In this sense, we can identify the *philosophical competence* as the *third condition* necessary for the successful transfer of expertise from the level of culture to that of everyday communication. Along with *expert knowledge* and its *practical application*, it makes this transfer possible; whereas its actual utilization in problem solving aiming to ensure that transfer is exercised as a reflective *critical thought.* Thus, we can complete the picture of situating philosophy in modernity within our perspective here: in the grand division of labor of the different areas of knowledge and practice, the role of *philosophy* now reappears as *competence*; whereas the *philosophical competenc*e ultimately manifests itself as *critical thinking* which brings *expert knowledge* from the level of theoretical culture to that of *practical application.*

2. The Self and the Art of Living: Philosophy as Self-creation

Habermas' notion of the mediating role of philosophy in modernity – a role whose manifestation we specified as critical thought and competence – can be linked with Foucault's investigations on what he calls "technologies of the self."[28] Although Habermas has voiced his

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[26] Ibid., pp. 250, 276.

[27] Ibid., p. 383.

[28] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1*, edited by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997); cf. "Les techniques de soi," *Dits et Ecrits (1954-1988)*, tome IV (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994), pp. 783-813.

critical objections to postmodernism, including to the philosophical perspective of Foucault as strongly associated with it,[29] for our purpose here it will suffice to find a point of compatibility that would allow for an alignment of the perspectives of the two thinkers in complementarity. At the same time, even as we sideline the modernity-postmodernity debate in situating philosophy in our contemporary world, our re-focusing on the status of the self will very much resemble what Lyotard has characterized as key shift of attention between modernity and postmodernity – from legitimating holistic metanarratives to incommensurable unique singularities.[30] This is precisely what we want to emphasize here by associating the perspectives of Habermas and Foucault together – that judging about the philosophy's role in the life of the individual from the viewpoint of metanarrative is different from one from a vantage point that is recognizably unique and incommensurable. Elsewhere we have indicated the need of a broader background of humanistic knowledge, which is in an important sense *self-knowledge*, as a prerequisite for critical philosophical thinking on individual level.[31] Now we will endeavor to apperceive that need with view to the unique singularity of the individual, in which it manifests itself as individual's own concern with *self-knowledge* and *self-creation*.

Foucault has traced various forms of *self-care* and *self-knowledge*, and has indicated their importance in the "art of living" (*tekhne tou biou*) from Antiquity onwards. His research has been very much anthropological – what he calls "hermeneutics of the self" – and has focused on practices of late Antiquity and early Christianity, which have been indicative of self's basic motivation for self-knowledge. While he found that self-knowledge was largely associated with self-cultivation and socialization, a key observation that he makes is that for much of the Antiquity these practices place self-knowledge as part of a more fundamental concern – that of "the care of the self." In the Greco-Roman culture, the motto of the Delphic temple, *gnothi seauton or* "Know yourself", was the principle of self-knowledge, and was subordinated to *epimeleisthai sautou*, "to be concerned, to take care of yourself," which was the principle of self-care.[32] Foucault regards the relationship between these two principles as underlaying the Ancient "art of living," but he also emphasizes the changes in their statuses in that art throughout the history of Western culture.

He finds the first indicative discussions of the relation of the two principles in Plato's *Apology and Alcibiades I*. In the *Apology*, Socrates advices his co-citizens to "concern yourselves with yourselves," which for him meant to be concerned with "wisdom, truth, and the perfection of the soul," pointing also that it is "his mission" and service to the city to remind

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[29] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project," in Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (eds.), *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 53; cf. "Die Moderne- ein unvollendetes Projekt," *Kleine Politische Schriften*, I-IV (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981), S. 460; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, pp. 53, 97, 239ff; cf. *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*, SS. 67, 129, 280ff.

[30] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, pp. xxiii-xxvff, 27-37ff, 46ff, 59ff, 79ff; cf. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, pp. 7-9ff, 49-63ff, 75ff, 97ff.

[31] Rossen Roussev, "Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice: A Response to Recent Concerns for Critical Thinking," especially pp. 93-96, 104ff.

[32] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1*, p. 226; cf. "Les techniques de soi," *Dits et Ecrits (1954-1988)*, tome IV, pp. 786-787.

them about that. [33] In *Alcibiades*, the discussion of the two principles is more detailed, spreading over the relations of the care of oneself with political and erotic life, with self-cultivation and pedagogy, with the knowledge of oneself, and with the love of wisdom in relation to one's master. As Foucault sees it, the care of the self is the driving force in all these relations but its relation with the knowledge of oneself is pivotal. An important observation that he makes in this regard is that, unlike most of the thinkers of the Hellenistic and imperial periods, Plato gives priority to the second principle, a priority which found its way through modernity – firmly binding the care of the self to the knowledge of oneself.[34] Either way, we can note here that the two principle form a productive relationship which – regardless of how it has been construed in the cultural traditions – functions as a formative power in the "art of living" and manifests itself as *art of self-creation.*

In the Ancient and early Christian cultures, the care of oneself remained a principle "for social and personal conduct and for the art of life," and thus most fundamentally motivated the use of what Foucault calls "technologies of the self."[35] These "'technologies', each a matrix of practical reason," are different kinds and "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality."[36] To clarify the sense of this term and its relation to the art of living as self-creation, we need to draw attention to a common element that all technologies of the self share, which is designated with the Greek word *askesis*. As Foucault writes,

> No technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; nor can the art of living, the t*ekhne tou biou*, be learned without an *askesis* that should be understood as a training of the self by oneself. This was one of the traditional principles to which the Pythagoreans, the Socratics, the Cynics had long attached a great importance.[37]

Meaning 'exercise', 'practice', and 'work', *askesis* was an important aspect of the life and culture of the ancient Greeks ultimately amounting to a value system. It played a part in individual's cultivation and socialization likely in not such a drastic but more routine way than its modern-day image of anachronistic self-denial suggests. What is important for Foucault and for us here is that its key sense of a 'training of the self by oneself' bears on the relevance of self-knowledge for the 'art of living'. More particularly, as it broadly applies to various of the citizens' daily activities, *askesis*, the 'training of the self by oneself', provides for individual's self-cultivation and self-creation by use of truth and knowledge, including self-knowledge.

Askesis in this sense applies to a number of cultural practices of Antiquity and early Christianity that address the 'concern and relationship of the self with oneself' and thus function as 'technologies of the self'. Foucault finds notable examples of it in the Stoic ascetic practices,

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[33] Ibid., pp. 226-227; cf. p. 787.

[34] Ibid., pp. 228-231; cf. 789-792.

[35] Ibid., pp. 225-226; cf. pp. 785-786.

[36] Ibid., p. 225; cf. p. 785.

[37] Michel Foucault, "Self Writing," *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Foucault, Vol. 1*, p. 208; cf. "L'écriture de soi," *Dits et Ecrits (1954-1988)*, tome IV, pp. 417.

which include self-training and self-deprivation in the anticipation of difficult life circumstances,[38] as well as in the Christian monastic confessional practices, which include examination of the purity of one's own thoughts in the end of every day, or public confession (exomologesis) of sins and sinful thoughts.[39] As cases in point on the role of *askesis* in the art of living, here I shall draw attention to two practices of purposive writing and reading that Foucault discusses in this regard – those of maintaining diary notebooks *hupomnemata* and epistolary *correspondence*. They are specific technologies of the self that are indicative of a special discursively mediated 'concern and relationship of the self with oneself' and thus of a more immediately identifiable use of self-knowledge in the art of living as self-creation.

Hupomnemata, which could refer to "account books, public registers, or individual notebooks serving as memory aids," were used to record "quotes, ... extracts from books, examples, and actions that one had witnessed or read about, reflections or reasonings that one had heard or that had come to mind" that later on served as a food for "rereading and meditation."[40] As Foucault writes,

> Inside a culture strongly stamped by traditionality, by the recognized value of the already-said, by the recurrence of discourse, by "citational" practice under the seal of antiquity and authority, there developed an ethic quite explicitly oriented by concern for the self toward objectives defined as: withdrawing into oneself, getting in touch with oneself, living with oneself, relying on oneself, benefiting from and enjoying oneself. Such is the aim of the *hupomnemata*: to make one's recollection of the fragmentary logos, transmitted through teaching, listening, or reading, a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself, a relationship as adequate and accomplished as possible.[41]

Hupomnemata in this sense stand for a form of writing which is very much constitutive of the person in one's own life. It involves discourse and knowledge to fuel one's thinking in one's day to day activities. It helps one 'get in touch with oneself' and make what one does bear on oneself. It is a form of self-writing expressive of one's concern with oneself and knowledge of oneself. It is 'a means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself', which is utilized in one's care of oneself.

The practice of reading is involved in the use of *hupomnemata* but it also plays a role of a technology of self on its own in general. Like *hupomnemata*, it invokes the resource of the cultural tradition to bear on one's life but it can go further and be practiced for its own sake. Foucault's reference to a Seneca advice is particularly indicative in this regard: while reading is necessary to "arm oneself by oneself with the principles of reason that are indispensable for self-conduct," when overdone one is "liable to spread oneself across different thoughts, and to forget oneself"; it is thus better to "have alternate recourse" of reading and writing, and to "blend one with the other."[42] Apparently, what Seneca's advice aims is to preserve the relation of the self to oneself in one's life; in excessive reading that relation could be lost, and then what one does no longer bear on oneself – one no longer knows oneself, one 'forgets oneself'. Hence,

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[38] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," pp. 238ff; pp. 799ff.

[39] Ibid., pp. 242ff; 804ff.

[40] Michel Foucault, "Self Writing," p. 209; cf. p. 418.

[41] Ibid., p. 211; cf. pp. 419-420.

[42] Ibid., p. 211; cf. p. 420.

one needs to balance and 'blend' reading with writing. In this sense, for Foucault, the alternate reading-writing technology produces an embodied appropriation of the truth that preserves one's concern with oneself in one's life intact; it can thus serve as a "principle of rational action" for the individual, which helps "constitute one's own soul" and "form an identity." [43]

A technology of the self that is exemplary for an alternate reading and writing is *correspondence*. For Foucault, correspondence is not just "a training of oneself by means of writing," nor simply aiming at "counsel and aid"; it is also "a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others," or "an objectification of the soul." [44] It allows for a certain examination of one's self, which can be done by writer and reader alike, as well as by other potential observers. It re-assures oneself that one maintains one's inner dispositions; that is, one's relation to oneself, which is thus attested as if by an 'inner god':

> Through the missive, one opens oneself to the gaze of others and puts the correspondent in the place of the inner god. It is a way of giving ourselves to that gaze about which we must tell ourselves that it is plunging into the depths of our heart (*in pectis intimum introspicere*) at the moment we are thinking. [45]

In this way, correspondence assumes the role of a self-formative technique for the individual, be they in the position of writer or reader. It deploys discourse, knowledge, and truth in a way similar to the one *hupomnemata* does to uphold the concern of the self with oneself throughout one's life. The difference with *hupomnemata* is that correspondence is additionally characterized by an anticipated concordance with other individuals. The letters by Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, which Foucault gives as examples, convey descriptions and discussions, often very detailed, of various events of higher and lesser significance taking place in the life of the single individual. They point to the manner and considerations by which these events are appropriated in one's life; that is, within the concern of the self with oneself, and constitute at once training, cultivating, and examining oneself. Correspondence thus reappears as a technique of one's continuous self-discovery, self-affirmation, and self-creation along the lasting concern of the self with oneself.

While both *hupomnemata* and *correspondence* may utilize mundane, advisory, moralistic, consoling or other content, they present us with the specific manner in which one's way of thinking mediates one's actions within one's concern with oneself throughout one's life. Foucault's discussion of the *technologies of the self* shows that the manner of thinking in question utilizes *self-knowledge* and is rooted in *self-care*. These two principles, which we inherit from Antiquity, come along in a relationship that has been frequently revised throughout the history of culture, (as in the above-mentioned Stoic ascetic and Christian confessional practices). However, regardless of the manner of its construction, the relationship in question is indispensable for the art of living and needs to be maintained continuously. It is thus the core and the moving force of the *art of self-creation* as the condition for self's relation to an ever changing world.

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[43] Ibid., pp. 213-214; cf. pp. 422-423.

[44] Ibid., pp. 216-217; cf. pp. 425-426.

[45] Ibid., p. 217; cf. p. 426.

Foucault's investigations on the art of living fit easily within the perspective of our investigation on the role of philosophy in our contemporary world. In the concern of the self with oneself – in re-focusing on oneself – the self withdraws from the world to make oneself a unique object of knowledge. This knowledge, which is essentially self-knowledge and unique on its own, is utilized in one's relation to the world by way of thinking. For its part, this thinking is essentially a philosophical thinking, and at once critical and creative thinking. It is the thinking of a concernful self-knowing self, which only thus relates to the world in a manner most fitting. Overall, Foucault's investigations have focused more on practices than on 'expertise' and have indicated that what is important for the single individual in bridging the levels of their world are the principles of *self-knowledge* and *self-care* in the unity of *self-creation*.

In conclusion

In this paper we endeavored to situate the role and place of philosophy in our contemporary world with the help of the work of Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. Issuing from Habermas' notion of modernity we apprehended the dynamics of our contemporary world in the terms *expert knowledge*, *critical thought*, and *practical application*. In Habermas' view, the role of philosophy in modernity is one of a *mediating interpreter*, which facilitates the transfer of *expert knowledge* from the level of theoretical culture to its *practical application* on the level of everyday communication. We elaborated further on this philosophy's role to identify the peculiar character of *philosophy as competence* – an additional kind of knowledge-capacity which supplements the *expertise* to make its exchange between the levels of theoretical culture and everyday practice possible. In this sense, we affirmed the *philosophical competence* as an indispensable asset for all problem solvers in the grand division of labor of our contemporary world pointing that its utilization is exercised as *critical thought*.

Whereas Habermas' notion of modernity helped us situate philosophy in an socio-cultural perspective, we used some of Foucault's investigations to focus attention on its role in the life of the particular individual. Foucault's analyses of various "technologies of the self" practiced primarily in Western Antiquity and early Middle Ages uncovered *self-knowledge* and *self-care* as fundamental principles of what back then was considered "the art of living." Identifying *self-care* as the more fundamental principle driven by one's concern with oneself, Foucault emphasizes its inseparability form that of *self-knowledge* for purposes of self-cultivation and socialization. In this sense, the unity of the two principles, as maintained within "the art of living," can be seen as powering one's continuous *self-creation* which – utilizing *self-knowledge* within *self-care* by way of reflective thinking – affirms one's relation with oneself and with the world. And similarly, the thinking of *self-creation*, at once critical and creative, can be seen as being in its essence philosophical and as effectively mediating one's knowledge in practice.

Drawing on Habermas and Foucault, our investigation identifies the role and place of philosophy in our contemporary world at once as *competence* and *self-creation*. Though initially associated with different philosophical perspectives, these two senses of philosophy are complimentary and convergent, and ultimately overlap, as each of them is an inevitable aspect of the other. The *philosophical competence*, as critical thought, always utilizes *self-*

knowledge in *self-care*, which is effectively *self-creation* – at the very least as a successful problem solver. *Self-creation*, as drawing on *self-knowledge* in self-care, is always reflectively mediated by critical and creative thinking, which is essentially a *philosophical competence* utilizing a general sense of one's relation to oneself and to the world.

Elsewhere we have indicated that in the general case one's *philosophical competence* cannot be separated from one's background of *humanistic knowledge*, which is a knowledge of *humanity*, of *humanities*, as well as *self-knowledge*.[46] In this sense, one's utilization of that competence; that is, one's self-creation, or otherwise put, one's critical and creative thinking, is ultimately dependent on *knowledge of the self as human person*. Philosophers may not be surprised by this assertion, for they know that the human self in its capacity of knowing subject has been the central motif of the philosophy of modernity, as much as in its capacity of a particular living subject it has become a focal point for the postmodern philosophy. Either way; that is, in the perspective of our contemporary world, the guiding maxim of the human self remains the same: it needs to know itself to be able to manage itself, apply itself, care of itself, or – otherwise put – create itself, both theoretically and practically.

In relevance to it, we sum up, Habermas has pointed to the rationalistic training of philosophy; whereas Foucault has signaled its capacity for creativity within "the art of living." On a final note, as Foucault has pointed that the modern time has given precedence to self-knowledge over self-care to the detriment of the art of self-creation, he has also added his voice to that of Nietzsche's who calls for integration of art and reason in the creation of one's own person:

> One thing is needful. – To "give style" to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. . . In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste![47]

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[46] Rossen Roussev, "Philosophy and the Transition from Theory to Practice: A Response to Recent Concerns for Critical Thinking," pp. 93ff.

[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), §290, p. 232; cf. *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. La gaya scienza* Berlin: Edition Holzinger, 2016), §290, S. 161.