

Foucault's Concern for the Care of the Self

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I shall never stop practicing philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way. My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honor, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the care of yourself (29d).¹

– Plato in the Apology

There has been a renewed and intensified interest in the study of Hellenistic philosophy. In the past, ancient philosophy was heavily skewed on the works of Plato and Aristotle.² This penchant for these Greek philosophers has dominated the landscape of ancient philosophy couched in a highly metaphysical discourse that focuses on the attainment of knowledge for its own sake. Histori-

¹ Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, trans. & eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 15-16. This quotation is taken from this book, except the phrase “the care of your self.” To be consistent with the translation of Foucault’s work, we shall use the phrase “care of the self.”

² Katerina Ierodiakonou, “Introduction. The Study of Stoicism: Its Decline and Revival,” in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy*, ed. Katerina Ierodiakonou (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 1-22.

cally, the emergence of Hellenistic culture has opened ancient philosophy to some transformations in the development of Greek philosophy. These transformations have resulted into “the historical distance between Hellenistic thought and the Greek tradition preceding it.”³ However, this distance does not necessarily imply that there is a clear-cut cultural break, but it only suggests a significant shift in the evolution of cultural practices. People have responded to these transformations which they have confronted in their everyday life. In a general way, we could characterize these transformations as the deterioration of the socio-political sway of the city (*polis*) which, in effect, prompts people to turn into an inward concern for the self. Thus, Hellenistic culture represents a “heightened individualism and interiority” among the upper class of the society.⁴ This particular individualism is related to the intensification and valorization of the so-called cultivation of the self or the art of life (*techne tou biou*).⁵

Furthermore, these transformations have precipitated the shift in Greek philosophical preoccupation of the self. People have “sought in philosophy rules of conduct that were more personal.”⁶ Consequently, the “classical speculations of Plato and Aristotle about a metaphysical and cosmological order of things were replaced by the ethical concerns of Hellenistic philosophy.”⁷ Hellenistic philosophy is a way of life or, more specifically, a moral conduct that should be translated into practice in everyday life so that it can

³ Pierre Hadot, “Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy,” trans. Arnold Davidson and Paula Wissing, in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 207.

⁴ Paul Allen Miller, “Catullan Consciousness, The Care of the Self, and the Force of the Negative in History,” in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, eds. David H.J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller and Charles Patter (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 172.

⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self, History of Sexuality, vol. 3*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 43.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁷ Luther, Martin, “Technologies of the Self and the Self Knowledge in the Syrian Thomas Tradition,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Hugh Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988), p. 51.

bring about a life according to its desired goal.⁸ This practical philosophy is the art of life *par excellence* which has provided some necessary answers to the urgent and immediate needs of human life. Indeed, the goal of this practical philosophy is the attainment of happiness (*eudaimonia*) of the individual. This philosophy has employed a medical analogy: just as the task of the physician is to heal the body, so the task of the philosopher is to heal the self (*psyche*). Hence, philosophy and medicine are closely interwoven in antiquity.⁹

STOIC ETHICAL PHILOSOPHY

Stoic philosophy has impacted on the everyday life of the people. From the ancient Greco-Roman perspective, piety (*eusebia*) is primarily restricted to a participation in a particular cult. In this sense, piety refers to the right or appropriate behavior or manner towards the gods.¹⁰ Comparatively, human beings are subordinate logos (*spermatikoi logoi*) to the supreme logos. The god, who is the supreme logos, hems in the meaning of the world. Thus, the god is not an isolated but is encompassed within the sphere of nature.¹¹ Moreover, they maintain that the world is governed by the supreme logos, which is also called nature (*physis*). Accordingly, nature includes all things that exist in the world. The world is a continuum in the process of evolution which is governed by a guiding plan that is immanent in the world. As a result, the world is an interconnected whole tethered on this plan.¹² Thus, the whole universe is a well-ordered cosmos. To be ethical in this sense, human beings should properly understand the universe so that they can properly integrate themselves into this well-ordered cosmos.¹³ Thus, stoic

⁸ Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics," in *Michel Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 123.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, pp. 42-44.

¹⁰ David E. Aune, "Sources in Ancient Greece and Rome," in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter H. Van Ness (New York: SMC Press, 1996), pp. 24-25.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 27.

¹² Gerard Watson, *Greek Philosophy and the Christian Notion of God* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1994), pp. 42-48.

¹³ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, pp. 33-34.

ethics is organically related to the order of nature. Nature is taken to be a rational agent that arranges the world into a whole universe. The rationality of the world hinges on the good. Thus, to follow the law of nature is to tread the path of the good.¹⁴

There are two kinds of affection in the soul, namely, the good and the bad affection. Good affection (*eupatheia*) corresponds to virtue, which is a life in accordance with the law of nature. The bad affection relates to vice, which is the cause of evil, not nature, in the world. This bad affection emanates from passion (*pathos*). Thus, passion contains the irrational aspects of the soul, which causes much suffering that disrupts the order of nature.¹⁵ Passion is a disturbance or, better, a disease which affects and deranges nature.¹⁶ Thus, to restore nature, this disturbance or disease should be extirpated.¹⁷ In order to overcome evil, it is necessary to achieve *apatheia*. In this regard, *apatheia* does not mean a state of *anesthesia* which strips off affections but rather it requires that emotions are put into a rationally controlled behavior so that they are totally subordinate or subservient to reason. Thus, the virtuous person is apathetic, that is, free from any intrusion of passion to reason.¹⁸ To contain emotions under rational control is to enable human beings to attain a virtuous life. Virtue is a state whereby the possessor would always do what is right, which is only possible when one knows the right thing to do in concrete situations. The stoics assume that, in order to achieve true well being and to have a good life, human being needs a certain competence in life. In concrete, to be virtuous is to know the right thing in taking care of oneself and in dealing with particular situations and problems

¹⁴ Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology," in *The Stoics*, ed. John M. Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 161.

¹⁵ Michel Frede, "The Stoic Doctrine of the Affections of the Soul," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. Malcolm Schofield & Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 97.

¹⁶ John Rist, "The Stoic Concept of Detachment," in *The Stoics*, ed. John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 259.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Michael Frede, "The Stoic Doctrine of the Affections of the Soul," in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. Malcolm Schofield & Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 93.

that one confronts in her/his everyday life. The stoics believe that human being has a sense of affection or endearment for herself/himself, especially in the care of her/his own body. To care for the self, one should possess some moral character which is a purified reason or controlled affection of the soul.¹⁹ Pleasure and pain would arise from false judgments or misjudgments about experience in perceiving the order of nature.²⁰ To avoid these false judgments, the stoics think that one has to be competent in life that disposes her/him to manage her/his life. Thus, competence is a real art of life.²¹ In this sense, virtue and wisdom are inseparable.²²

Moreover, the stoics believe that sex is at the center of pleasure.²³ In this sense, the body is the site of pleasure.²⁴ According to stoic sexual ethics, the juvenile body possessing a peculiar charm is assumed to be the right object of pleasure because it is juxtaposed with the qualities of virility and beauty. The rule for pleasure has always been governed by virtue. In this case, sex is governed by moderation, austerity and even abstinence.²⁵ In moderation, sex should be restricted only for the sole purpose of human procreation. However, one could not practice moderation without certain form and condition of knowledge. "One could not form oneself as an ethical subject in the use of pleasures without forming oneself at the same time as a subject of knowledge."²⁶

¹⁹ John M. Rist, "The Stoic Concept of Detachment," p. 261.

²⁰ Marcia L. Colish, "The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, I Stoicism," in *Classical and Latin Literature* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), pp. 36 & 42-44.

²¹ Michael Frede, "On the Stoic Conception of the Good," in *The Stoics*, ed. John Rist (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 71.

²² F.H. Sandback, *The Stoics* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1989), p. 28.

²³ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 191.

²⁴ Frederick M. Schroeder, "The Self in Ancient Religious Experience," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman, World Spirituality*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (New York: SMC Press, 1986), p. 348.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure, History of Sexuality, vol. 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 200.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Accordingly, the accent is placed on the relationship with the self that prepares one to refrain from being carried away by the forceful lust of unruly pleasures. In this sense, one should maintain a mastery and superiority over these unruly pleasures by keeping a state of tranquility in the soul and remaining free from the interior bondage of passions so that one can achieve a mode of self-enjoyment. In short, this self-knowledge enforces a perfect mastery of oneself over oneself.²⁷ In effect, the overriding theme becomes the concern for rationality in one's behavior rather than solely for the sake of one's knowledge. Thus, rationality is linked with one's practical care for the self. If ever there is a concern for rationality, it is not just for the sake of knowledge that one is engaged into it, but rather it is in the concern for the self that one is led into it. There is no clearly delineated demarcation line separating rationality from the concern for the self. In this sense, the concern for the self is a reasonable activity of the individual. After all, in general, nature means that one has to take care of herself/himself.²⁸

THE CARE OF THE SELF

To begin with, let us look into the verbal exchange between Socrates, the master, and Alcibiades, the disciple, as recorded in a dialogue, which is attributed to Plato.

*ALCIBIADES I*²⁹

Socrates: Come then, what is "taking care of oneself" – for we may perchance be taking, unanswered, no pains over ourselves, though we think we are – and when does a man actually at the same time as over his own things (128)

Alcibiades: I at least believe so.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

²⁸ Michael Frede, "On the Stoic Conception of the Good," p. 93.

²⁹ Plato, *Plato*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (London: William Heinemann, 1964), pp. 175 & 189.

- Socrates: Well then, could we ever know what makes the man himself better, if we were ignorant of what we are ourselves?
- Alcibiades: Impossible.
- Socrates: Well, and is it an easy thing to know oneself, and was it a mere scamp who inscribed these words of the temple at Delphi; or is it a hard thing, and not a task for anybody?
- Alcibiades: I have often thought, Socrates, that it was for anybody; but often, too, that it was very hard.
- Socrates: But, Alcibiades, whether it is easy or not, here is the fact for us all the same: if we have that knowledge, we are like to know what pains to take care of ourselves; but if we have it not, we never can (128e-129a).

In the Delphic oracle, Alcibiades confronted two related questions; one is the nature of the self; and second, the nature of care. Alcibiades tried to find the self in a dialectical movement. When you care for the body alone, you actually do not take care for the self since the self is not about "clothing, tools or possessions," but it is located in the principle that uses these clothing, tools or possessions.³⁰ In this sense, the principle is not of the body but of the soul. Accordingly, you have to worry about the soul because it is the principle of activity that takes care of the self. Thus, "the care of the self is the care of the activity, and not the care of the self as substance."³¹ Certainly, Plato focuses on inwardness that locates human identity within the soul or mind.³² In other words, the soul contains the principle of life. Hence, "the care of oneself denotes a manner of living as well as self-knowledge."³³ This care implies the inevitability and the need for the soul to engage

³⁰ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p. 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Frederick M. Schroeder, "The Self in Ancient Religious Experience," p. 350.

³³ Thomas Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France," p. 108.

into self-reflection by contemplating itself. Like a mirror, the soul is capable of knowing itself. According to Platonic epistemology, the body is the prison-cell of the soul. In a way, knowledge is a matter of remembering or recalling the memories inscribed in the interiority of the soul. These memories are brought into the present by means of self-examination “aimed at a collection of principles that have been forgotten, and that, through meditation, have the power to transform the self so as to make it a more efficient administrator of the self.”³⁴ Moreover, the divine element in the self dwells in the human soul. In self-knowledge, “the soul must contemplate the divine element in [it].” In this contemplation of the divine, “the soul will be able to discover [the] rules [that] serve as a basis for just behavior and political action.” These rules discovered in the soul are the principles “on which just political action can be founded.” Through self-knowledge, “Alcibiades will be a good politician insofar as he contemplates his soul in the divine element.”³⁵ Thus, the care for oneself and political activity in the *polis* are therefore intimately linked together. They are “so woven together that one cannot, without distortion, isolate any of these issues from the entire philosophical thematics of which they form part.”³⁶

In the work on *Alcibiades*, Socrates underscores the significance of the injunction or imperative of the care of the self. In their conversation, Alcibiades, who is young and ambitious, wanted to become a leader both in the spheres of politics and war. Socrates employed his *midwifing* method in questioning him in order to elicit his possible answers. In the end, he showed that at this stage Alcibiades was still inexperienced and unequipped in effectively governing the city. Socrates then reminded him of the Delphic principle, that is, if he wanted to govern well, he should know himself. Alcibiades inquired “about how he might achieve this self-knowledge.” Socrates responded “that he would come to know himself if he takes care of himself.” Socrates showed to Alcibiades

³⁴ James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Towards an Ethics for Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990), p. 173.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” pp. 24-25.

³⁶ Arnold Davidson, “Ethics as Ascetics,” pp. 134-135.

that it was quite presumptuous for him to govern the city. He should first learn "that which was necessary to know in order to govern; he must first attend to himself." In the care of the self, "the domain of the political and the philosophical intersects."³⁷ The "concern for self always refers to an active political and erotic state." This "is always a real activity and not just an attitude" of the individual.³⁸ Thus, Socrates links self-knowledge and the care of the self. To realize this injunction, one needs to persuade the individual to the care of the self.³⁹ In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault characterizes the care of the self as the art of living.⁴⁰

In western antiquity, the self is defined as one's life project in its integrity.⁴¹ In Greek culture, the Delphic oracle is a project of self-knowledge.⁴² Human beings have a natural tendency to know themselves. If they want to live in accordance with nature, they must first know the logical order of the universe. As we have said, the stoics equate god, nature and reason set in a well-ordered cosmos. To conform with nature is therefore to possess the knowledge of god.⁴³ Thus, the expressions know yourself (*gnosti sautou*) and the care of the self (*epimelesthai sautou*) are the recurring themes in the Greco-Roman philosophy.⁴⁴ In his *Technologies of*

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 44.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p. 19.

³⁹ Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics," p. 133.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 43.

⁴¹ Frederick M. Schroeder, "The Self in Ancient Religious Experience," p. 338.

⁴² Ibid., p. 246.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 353.

⁴⁴ There are various translations and interpretations of the *gnosti sautou*. Schmid translates it as "recognize oneself". He argues that the "*gnosti sauton* of Delphi is correctly translated as "Recognize oneself", that is, become aware of your place, your role in the scheme of things." He further clarifies that "self-knowledge means is knowledge of one's rational soul. It also suggests that that knowledge may consist at least in part in the recognition of the absolute priority of the rational soul over the body or other aspects of the soul. To know oneself on this view would require that one know one's rational soul and its needs, as compared to other things one might be concerned about." See: W. Thomas Schmid, *Plato's Charmides and the Socratic Ideal of Rationality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 43 & 19.

the Self, Foucault argues that “the injunction of having to know yourself [is] always associated with the other principle of having to take care of yourself.” One should be occupied or conscious with oneself before the Delphic principle is brought into action or put into operation. This “Delphic principle [is] not an abstract one concerning life,” rather it is a “technical advice, a rule to be observed for the consultation of the oracle.” Thus, this injunction means: “do not suppose yourself to be god,” or “be aware of what you really ask when you come to consult the oracle.”⁴⁵ This is the Socratic way of attempting “to convert his interlocutors from the unexamined way of life to the philosophical way of life.”⁴⁶

As we could see, the Socratic dialogue is exclusively ethical in its content, that is, it is concerned with an ethics for the care of the self. Human being cares for the self because this care, when it is constantly regulated, can lead to her/his happiness.⁴⁷ For the ancient Greeks, the care of the self is viewed as an art of living.⁴⁸ Care (*epimeleia*) is a medical term.⁴⁹ The concept of care “designates not just a preoccupation but a whole set of occupations of the self,” that is, an “activity devoted to oneself.”⁵⁰ These occupations to oneself are the means through which one can “rediscover the basic principles of rational conduct” that enable oneself to commune with herself/himself, to recollect her/his memories, to examine oneself and to understand oneself through following the precepts and contemplating the rules of life.⁵¹

However, the Delphic oracle is historically and recognizably ambiguous. This ambiguity has resulted to two distinct ways of

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Huch Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁶ Arnold Davidson, “*Ethics as Ascetics*,” p. 124.

⁴⁷ Terry Penner, “Socrates and the Early Dialogues,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 125 & 134-135.

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “*Technologies of the Self*,” p. 19.

⁴⁹ Frederick M. Schroeder, “*The Self in Ancient Religious Experience*,” p. 347.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 51.

⁵¹ James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, pp. 44 & 50.

interpreting it. The first has “focused on [the] metaphysics of the soul, its essence or being;” the second has “led to a stylistic of life, an aesthetic of existence.” The relationship of these two approaches should be restrained and nuanced. The care of the self is “a form of ethical self-relation” that “can never be understood as a mere reflection of an ontologically prior [thing],” but must be viewed as a response to a “practical and discursive situation.”⁵² To repeat, there is no clear-cut separation between knowledge and care. The “knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself.” In this sense, the care of oneself is a precondition for gaining self-knowledge. However, “in the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle.”⁵³ The knowledge of oneself becomes paramount in life at the expense of the care for the self. In modernity, the knowledge of oneself and care for the self are not just inverted but also unfortunately hierarchized. There is the “subordination of the second principle to the former.”⁵⁴ Thus, the “metaphysics of the soul dominated philosophic discourse in the West.”⁵⁵

REGIMENS OF THE BODY

The care of the self includes the regiments that pertain to the body, such as health, strength and beauty. In line with stoic ethics, the body should be natural or, better, should conform with nature. In this regard, human beings must choose what is natural in accord with specific and concrete situations.⁵⁶ The “[r]egimen should not be understood as a corpus of universal and uniform rules,” but rather “it [is] more in the nature of a manual for

⁵² Paul Allen Miller, “Catullan Consciousness, the Care of the Self, and the Force of the Negative History,” p. 173.

⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁵ Thomas Flynn, “Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France (1984),” in *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bernauer & David Rasmussen (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), p. 109.

⁵⁶ Gisela Striker, “Antipater, or the Art of Living,” in *The Norms of Nature: Studies in Hellenistic Ethics*, eds. Malcolm Schofield & Gisela Striker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 187-188.

reacting to situations in which one finds oneself, a treatise for adjusting one's behavior to fit the circumstances."⁵⁷ Thus, the "regimen [is] a whole art of living."⁵⁸ This regimen accounts for "numerous elements that elaborate the details of "day by day, all day long, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night" routine. "In different areas where it was required, regimen needed to establish a measure" that regulates this routine.⁵⁹ "In order to follow the right regimen, it [is] of course necessary to listen to those who knew, but this relationship [is] supposed to take the form of persuasion."⁶⁰

A. *Dietetics of the Body*

In Greek culture, "the care of the self is in close correlation with medical thought and practice."⁶¹ Foucault calls it dietetics which refers to the health regimens and physical exercises that the body strictly undergoes. Dietetics is "a mode of problematization of behavior that was indexed to a nature which had to be preserved and to which it was right to conform." It consists of "a set of rules to be affixed to conduct" that is carefully measured for the satisfaction of the needs of the body.⁶² Thus, regimens are set up in order to regulate the activity of the body, which is "recognized as being important for health."⁶³ For the Greeks then, diet is a fundamental category through which human behavior could be normalized and balanced. It is a way of managing human existence. Moreover, these regimens are also taken as moral precepts that are related to the many alimentary taboos that people imposed upon themselves. These taboos carry some cultural and religious significance inscribed in human behavior. They are criticisms "directed against every abuse connected with eating, drinking,

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

exercises, and sexual activities.”⁶⁴ The purpose of these regimens is “not to extend life as far as possible in time nor as high as possible in performance, but rather to make it useful and happy within the limits that had been set for it.” Thus, diet should follow the course of reasonableness. “The diet of the body had to be a matter of thought, deliberations and prudence.”⁶⁵

Dietetics is related to the concept of *pathos* which is applied to emotional passion as well as to physical illness. However, in both cases, *pathos* refers to a state of passivity because the medications and operations applied to the body are acted upon on it. In short, the body is submitted to these actions. The intrusion of *pathos* in the soul takes the form of disorder in the body that upsets the balance of its nature. To maintain its balance, a “regimen [is] addressed itself to the soul, and inculcated in the soul.”⁶⁶ Thus, “a whole art of self-knowledge is developed, with precise recipes, specific forms of examination, and codified exercises” in order to balance the body.⁶⁷ In short, the regimen as an art of living is something more than a set of precautions designed to prevent illnesses or complete their cure; rather it is a whole manner of forming oneself as a subject who had the proper, necessary and sufficient concern for the body. This concern is permeated in everyday life, making the major or common activities of existence a matter of health and ethics of the body. Thus, it proposes that the individual be equipped with “a rational mode of behavior.”⁶⁸

B. *Training of the Body*

The art of living is also linked with *askesis*, which pertains to “self-training” or “self-forming activity” where the body is subjected. In particular, *askesis* consists of various forms of activities which include “training, mediation, tests of thinking, examination

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

of conscience, control of representations” of the self.⁶⁹ These activities are considered indispensable in forming the self as a moral subject. The self is trained to undergo the rigors of ascetic practices so that it could attain its desired goal. *Askesis* is “not organized or conceived as a corpus of separate practices that would constitute a kind of specific art of the soul, with its techniques, procedures and prescriptions.”⁷⁰ Rather, it is the rehearsal that anticipates that practice. Thus, it is not distinct from the practice of virtue itself, but an integral part of the practice of a virtuous life of a free individual.⁷¹

In its various manifestations, *askesis* becomes a subject matter for teaching that constitutes a basic instrument in the direction of the soul. The care of the self is not only restricted in knowing oneself, but it also includes in effectively attending to oneself. This care can take the form of exercise and transformation of oneself.⁷² In the final analysis, it is geared toward the attainment of self-control. Through constant training, one becomes accustomed to the behavior that one would eventually have to regularly practice. Furthermore, it has to do with the fact that self-mastery and the mastery of others are inseparably related. One is “expected to govern oneself in the same manner that one is to govern one’s household and played one’s role in the city.”⁷³

C. *Pleasure of the Body*

Finally, the art of living is closely intertwined with the experience of sexual pleasures (*aphrodisia*). Accordingly, pleasures refer to various acts, gestures and contacts that produce a certain form of satisfaction in the body.⁷⁴ The regimens of the body are precisely meant for the attainment of these pleasures. To attain

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 74.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 77.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 73.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

pleasures, sexual acts are regimented. They are "placed under an extremely careful regimen" that prescribes a long-term preparation for sexual acts. "This [preparation] involves a general conditioning of the body and the soul designed to produce or maintain in the individual the qualities with which the semen will need to be imbued and by which the embryo will need to be marked."⁷⁵ In this sense, several years should pass during which the body forms the seminal liquids preserved in the body without immediately evacuating them. This long-term preparation is necessary to condition the body for subsequent sexual acts which produce lasting pleasures effectuated by the body. With a good preparation of the body, one can eventually have the child the couple wishes to have.⁷⁶

Considering its importance in procreation, a specific regimen is designed and enforced in order to ensure self-control with regard to sexual activities. According to age, sexual intercourse among old people is believed to be detrimental to their health. After sexual intercourse, the exhausted aging body is incapable of reconstituting and replenishing the elements withdrawn from it. In effect, this inability would hold back bodily condition. Moreover, at the age of puberty, sexual act is also harmful to health. Sexual act among the young could disturb the normal development of puberty stage which is the period of "the body's development of the seminal elements."⁷⁷ The young body needs to be disposed and prepared for the seminal development. Advisedly, sexual intercourse is believed to be most favorable after a moderate meal and before sleeping time. At this time, the food is sufficient enough to nourish and strengthen the body for any sexual activity. After sexual activity, sleep allows one to replenish the fatigued body. Furthermore, "this is the best moment for conceiving children [...] because the woman retains the sperm better while sleeping."⁷⁸ Thus, in sexual act, it is good to adopt an entire complex and continuous regimen of suitable exercise and proper nourishment of the body. In effect, one is admonished to keep this whole art of living

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, p. 125.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

for wholesome sexual pleasures so that s/he can attain an optimal sexual satisfaction.⁷⁹ The whole purpose of this regiment is to set some guidelines for the attainment of sexual pleasures such as “which conditions were favorable, which practice was recommended, which rarefaction was necessary.”⁸⁰

In summary, the entire general principle of the regimens applied and enforced to the body is the conversion to self (*epistrophe eis heautou*). “This conversion to self requires that one changes one’s activities and shifts one’s attention so as to constantly take care of oneself.”⁸¹ Furthermore, the relation to self which constitutes the end of the conversion and the final goal of the care of the self belong to the whole ethics of self-governance. If ever there is a care of the self, such care is in view of the mode of self-formation of the individual. The subject is subjected to these regiments in order to form her/him as an ethical subject. “The development of the cultivation of the self [has] produced its effect not in the strengthening of that which can thwart desire, but in certain modifications relating to the formative elements of ethical subjectivity.”⁸²

WRITING THE SELF

In his other writings, Foucault connects *askesis* to the act of writing the self. According to him, the training of writing the self made either for oneself or for others comes to play a considerable and significant role in the cultivation of the self. This writing of the self is meant for self-examination. By writing the self, one can develop the habit of reviewing the events that happen during the day. However, we have to note that there is nothing which indicates that this review takes exclusively the form of writing, but it only shows that the self is put beneath the gaze of the self or the other. By means of writing, the self is objectified for the

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 120.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 45-68.

purpose of self-examination. This self-examination is akin to the Christian practice of the examination of conscience made before the actual confession of the penitent to the confessor. In its development, the "examination of conscience [is] formulated as a written narrative of the self."⁸³

Moreover, the writing of the self seems to be above all a mental exercise tethered with the act of memorization. Through memorization, the self is constituted both as an inspector and examiner of oneself. This dual role puts the self into a gaze that not only inspects it from a distance, but it penetrates into the interiority of the soul. The scrutiny gauges the common faults measured by the internalized rules of conduct or behavior that must always be reactivated in the mind. In effect, the self becomes something to be objectified and written about. In its development, the writing to oneself and to others has occupied a major importance in the formation of the self. The self enters into an epistolary relationship to oneself and to others by means of introspection and vigilance that attends to the nuances and details of everyday life. By means of writing, the experience of oneself is widened in its scope and intensified in its vigilance. Consequently, a new field of experience is opened up, which, in earlier times, was non-existent.⁸⁴ Foucault points out that the writing of diary becomes the way of writing of the self.⁸⁵ In short, throughout history, this morality becomes a practice of self-occupation at a certain moment.⁸⁶ This morality is an exercise of self-improvement that concerns the care of the self. "It is neither a struggle against one's innermost thoughts and feelings nor a methodical effort to ferret out evil."⁸⁷

⁸³ Michel Foucault, "Writing the Self," trans. Ann Hobart, in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 235 & 245-246.

⁸⁴ Philip Barker, *Michel Foucault: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp. 79-80.

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, "Writing the Self," p. 245.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

⁸⁷ Paul Allen Miller, "Catullan Consciousness, the Care of the Self, and the Force of the Negative in History," p. 184.

However, Foucault also accepts that writing of the self has not been the dominant and central concern in antiquity. Nonetheless, writing is always important in the formation and governance of the self. For instance, let us take Plato. We know that Plato wrote a considerable amount of philosophical treatises which consist of the texts in the Platonic dialogues that give credence of his relation to himself. However, this writing seems relatively restrained because he neither cultivated the practice of the self as a practice of self-examination. Nonetheless, in the beginning of the first century, Foucault underscores the fact that we already can witness the proliferation of writings as a novel relation to the self such as in the forms of recommendation, advice and guidance. For example, in the Roman Empire, young people were required to observe proper behavior during lessons given to them. Among other things, they were taught a model of writing that showed the manner of formulating questions and providing answers in a didactic form.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing analysis, we have asserted that the care of the self in antiquity is a forgotten aspect in the development of mainstream philosophical thinking. Historically, with the emphasis on metaphysical discourses, the care of the self has been relegated to the margin of philosophical thought. Admittedly, this prevailing practice is difficult to overcome or even just to alter our well-entrenched philosophical practices. In a highly metaphysically informed philosophy, the body is considered as the other of the soul. The soul is equated with rationality, while the body is identified with its opposite – irrationality. Foucault has reclaimed the marginalized or forgotten body whose place in philosophical thought is redefined. This retrieval of the care of the self linked with the body demonstrates the usefulness of the Hellenistic culture in a shift of our philosophical enterprise.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, trans. Alan Sheridan, et. al., ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 246.

However, trying to rethink the ancient culture today does not consist of setting off Hellenistic morality as an exemplary model of morality *par excellence* which one could readily emulate for self-cultivation. The point is rather to see to it that our thinking can take up Hellenistic thinking again as an experience which took place once in history and, out of this thinking, we can explore alternative possibilities in the formation or cultivation of the self as an ethical subject. To retrace Hellenistic thought then is not to draw out some pristine and eternal ethical principles, which we can use in determining our contemporary morality. On the contrary, it is in thinking through this history that we can explore the possibility of constituting and reconstituting the self. As we have argued, the self is an effect of formation and governance of regimes where the body is subjected and particularized. We should always pose this skeptical question: What are we today? This question should dwell into differentiated and particularized bodies. We can then move into a process of constitution and reconstitution of our bodies through the realm of our imaginary freedom that can chart and design ourselves today.

In his historical analysis, Foucault calls these practices of the care of the self as technologies where the self follows some regiments in order to produce an ethical subject. For him, the “technologies of the self permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”⁸⁹ These operations are given and applied to the self in order to transform the self and achieve an end. Thus, these technologies are both process- and goal-oriented operations. The regimens of the body such as the careful scrutiny of consciousness, methodical mediation on the self and the written articulation of the self are aimed at the reinforcement of the rational self-control or self-mastery which promises a perfect governance of the self and, in effect, a wise social conduct.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, “*Technologies of the Self*,” p. 18.

⁹⁰ James W. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight*, p. 173.

In short, the care of the self is an ethical enterprise. Ethics is a component of morality that concerns the relationship of the self to itself.⁹¹ In this regard, morality should not just focus exclusively on the application of moral behavior to the self, but it should also carefully attend to the forms of moral regimens that subject the body. This subjectification governs the manner of constituting and reconstituting the self as a moral subject according to its own action.⁹² The self is formed by this manner of constitution and reconstitution. In other words, the self is an effect of these technologies. These technologies of the self, that is, the ways in which a subject relates to itself, contribute to the forms in which our subjectivity is constituted and reconstituted, as well as to the forms in which we govern our thoughts and conducts. We relate to ourselves as specific kinds of subjects that behave in particular ways.⁹³ □

⁹¹ Ian Hacking, "Self-Improvement," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 239.

⁹² Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and the Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 118.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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